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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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US SC STRIKES DOWN TRUMP'S SWEEPING TARIFFS

WASHINGTON, 20 FEB

The Supreme Court struck down President Donald Trump's far-reaching global tariffs on Friday, handing him a significant loss on an issue crucial to his economic agenda.

The 6-3 decision centres on tariffs imposed under an emergency powers law, including the sweeping "reciprocal" tariffs he levied on nearly every country.

It's the first major piece of Trump's broad agenda to come squarely before the nation's highest court, which he helped shape with the appointments of three conservative jurists in his first term.

The majority found that the Constitution gives Congress the power to impose taxes, which include tariffs. "The Framers did not vest any part of the taxing power in the Executive Branch," Chief Justice John Roberts wrote.

Justices Samuel Alito, Clarence Thomas and Brett Kavanaugh dissented.

Trump called the majority decision "a disgrace". He was meeting privately with nearly two dozen governors from both parties when the decision was released. The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The majority did not address whether companies could get refunded for the billions they have collectively paid in tariffs. Many companies including warehouse chain Costco have already lined up to demand refunds in lower courts. Kavanaugh noted the process could be complicated. —*PTI*

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India joins US-led Pax Silica alliance for AI, rare minerals

The alliance aims to cut reliance on China for minerals

NEW DELHI, 20 FEB

India on Friday formally joined the US-led strategic alliance, Pax Silica, in a move seen as a step in efforts to build resilient supply chains for critical minerals and artificial intelligence. This to reduce over-dependence on any single country, an apparent reference to China.

Welcoming New Delhi into the coalition, US Under Secretary for Economic Affairs Jacob Helberg highlighted risks arising from "massively over-concentrated" supply chains and warned of "economic coercion and blackmail", remarks widely interpreted as aimed at Beijing's export controls on rare earth minerals. China's dominance in rare earth supplies has implications for electronics, clean energy, aerospace, automotive and defence industries worldwide.

US Ambassador to India Sergio Gor described Pax Silica as a "coalition of capabilities" designed to replace "coercive dependencies" with trusted industrial partnerships.

India signed the pact at the AI Impact Summit in the presence of Union Electronics and IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, Helberg and Gor. The senior US official said the alliance was building a new architecture to diffuse AI capabilities and unlock unprecedented opportunities across partner nations.

The move comes amid efforts by New Delhi and Washington to finalise a proposed trade deal and advance several other initiatives to deepen bilateral ties following a period of strain in relations.

Launched in December by US, Pax Silica aims to create a secure rare minerals for semiconductors and AI infrastructure.

The move comes amid efforts by New Delhi and Washington to finalise a proposed trade deal and advance several other initiatives to deepen bilateral ties following a period of strain in relations.

Founding members include Australia, Greece, Israel, Japan, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom.

India's participation is viewed as a major win for Washington as India has one of the biggesttech market. India is positioning itself as a semiconductor hub, with its first fabrication plant set to begin commercial production soon and 2nm chips already being designed domestically. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

US Ambassador to India Sergio Gor with Union Minister for Electronics and Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnaw during an event announcing India joining the Pax Silica initiative, in New Delhi —*PTI*

HYD, JABALPUR ON EDGE TOO

Security forces maintain vigil in Bagalkot on Friday —*PTI*

Tension grips Bagalkot after stones pelted near mosque

BAGALKOT, 20 FEB

Prohibitory orders were imposed in Bagalkot on Friday following an alleged stone-pelting incident near a mosque during Shivaji Jayanthi that triggered communal unrest, police said. Officers resorted to a lathicharge to disperse the crowd, and security has been tightened around sensitive areas, including the mosque and a nearby temple.

Hyderabad too witnessed similar tensions on Friday when a Shivaji Jayanthi procession passed through mosque in Amberpet during Ramadan prayers. The Muslim side objected to the loud music and sloganeering during the procession, leading to an argument and a brief scuffle. Unrest was also reported in In Madhya Pradesh's Jabalpur over alleged vandalism of Durga temple complex.

In Bagalkot, the procession marking Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj was taken near a mosque in Killa locality. Superintendent of Police Siddharth Goyal said two stones were thrown at the procession. He claimed that stones had been placed beneath a shoe rack inside the mosque.

Stones were also hurled at least four meat shops, while three vegetable carts in a nearby market were set ablaze. Hindutva activist Prakash Arakeri sustained injuries and was ad-mitted to a hospital.

Eight people, including the prime accused Tanzeer, were arrested. Prohibitory orders will remain in force till 24 February, restricting the assembly of more than four people. —*Salar News*

Journalists protest restrictions in Vidhana Soudha

BENGALURU, 20 JAN

Dozens of journalists protested a recent government circular which restricted media access in the State Secretariat in front of the Mahatma Gandhi statue in Vidhana Soudha. The government had recently restricted movement for journalists citing safety concerns, and said that reporters would not allowed to follow ministers when they entered the building to record video statements. The journalists said these restrictions would hamper their routine functioning.— Salar News

>>>More on Page 2

Petitions filed to 'embarrass' states ahead of poll: SC

NEW DELHI, 20 FEB

Supreme Court refused to entertain a petition seeking the regulation regarding the use of PVC flex boards in Kerala. It commented that the petition looks like an attempt to "embarrass the government before the elections." The bench liberty to the petitioner to pursue other remedies, including intervening in the other proceedings in the High Court regarding flex boards. The petition was filed by an NGO challenging the High Court's refusal to entertain the petition seeking to address the issue of pollution caused by plastic products. —*PTI*

AR Rahman agrees to give credit to Junior Dagar Bros

NEW DELHI, 20 FEB

Music composer AR Rahman told the Supreme Court he will credit the Junior Dagar Brothers in 'Veera Raja Veera' from 'Ponniyin Selvan: II', stating it was inspired by the Dagarwani Dhrupad tradition and first recorded as "Shiv Stuti". The bench led by Chief Justice Surya Kant disposed of the plea, directing Rahman to deposit Rs 2 crore. The court said the modified credit must appear on all platforms within five weeks and clarified the pending civil suit will proceed independently." — *PTI*

SC deploys judicial officers for WB SIR

NEW DELHI, 20 FEB

The Supreme Court on Friday directed the deputation of serving and former district judges to assist the Election Commission (EC) in West Bengal's controversy-hit special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls. The bench, headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant and comprising Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi, criticised the "unfortunate blame game" and "trust deficit" between the EC and TMC government.

Judicial officers will adjudicate claims and objections of voters listed under logical discrepancies, such as mismatches in parent names or age differences between voters and parents outside 15–50 years. The court asked Calcutta High Court Chief Justice Sujoy Paul to spare officers and identify former judges to assist. A meeting with the Chief Secretary, DGP, EC officials, and state legal representatives has been scheduled for Saturday to finalise modalities.

Disregarding state objections, the court allowed the EC to publish the final voter list by 28 February, with supplementary lists permitted later. Senior advocates for the state, including Shyam Divan and Kapil Sibal, raised concerns over authority of special roll officers and potential law-and-order issues. The EC maintained that special roll officers have existed since inception. The bench warned that non-cooperation would prompt deployment of judicial officers from other states. District collectors and SPs have been directed to provide logistical support and security. —*PTI*

>>>More on Pages 3

Congress workers protest against a 'compromised PM Narendra Modi' during the AI Impact Summit at Bharat Mandapam, in New Delhi —*PTI*

Cong workers hold shirtless protest at AI Summit

NEW DELHI, 20 FEB

A group of Indian Youth Congress (IYC) workers staged a dramatic shirtless protest at the AI Impact Summit exhibition hall on Friday, denouncing the India-US trade deal and government policies. Protesters walked around holding T-shirts printed with slogans such as 'India-US Trade Deal', 'Epstein Files' and 'PM is compromised', along with images of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump.

Delhi Police detained around 10 participants and arrested four IYC workers: Krishna Hari, national secretary from Bihar; Kundan Yadav, Bihar state secretary; Ajay Kumar, head of Uttar Pradesh unit; and Narasimha Yadav from Telangana. Authorities said a wider conspiracy angle is being investigated. IYC president Uday Bhanu Chib is being questioned at the Parliament Street police station, and efforts are underway to apprehend remaining agitators.

The protesters had registered online to gain QR-code access to the summit. They initially wore jackets and sweaters, which they removed before staging the demonstration. After being removed from Exhibition Hall No 5, they marched to the lobby, stood against a large backdrop, and continued shouting slogans against the government.

The protest led to confrontations with summit attendees. BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra criticised it , saying, "Forthe Congress, I have just three words – topless, brainless and shameless." —*PTI*

>>>More on Pages 5 & 7

AI Summit drew USD 250 billion deals: Govt

India's AI Impact Summit has secured infrastructure investment commitments exceeding USD 250 billion, Union IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Friday. Over 70 countries have signed the 'Delhi Declaration', with the number expected to cross 80 by Saturday; sources said the US is also on board. The Delhi Declaration is a proposed non-binding international pledge on responsible AI development and was unveiled at India's AI Impact Summit in New Delhi. The declaration outlines seven principles to ensure AI systems are reliable, secure and transparent. The summit drew more than 5 lakh visitors.

USE AI OR NO PROMOTION: ACCENTURE

DUBLIN, 20 FEB

Tech firm Accenture has told senior staff they must use AI at work or risk missing out on promotions, sources said. The Financial Times reported this follows 11,000 job cuts, with roles deemed unsuitable for AI-driven work. The firm spent about $2 billion on severance over three years. Other companies are similarly pushing AI adoption. —*Agencies*

DOCUMENTARY HONOURS SECULAR VISIONARY K RAHMAN KHAN

A new Urdu documentary on Dr K Rahman Khan journals his unwavering commitment to education, social upliftment, and inclusive development.

Titled 'A Guiding Light for the Community', the documentary traces Dr Khan's contributions as a visionary leader who worked for empowerment and institutional growth. His tenure in public life reflects a combination of integrity, foresight, and humility. The film emphasizes how his leadership extended beyond politics, focusing instead on strengthening communities, promoting harmony, and nurturing young minds.

Eminent personalities reflect on his impact. Former vice president Hamid Ansari speaks of his intellectual clarity and balanced approach to public service. Veteran statesman Yashwant Sinha acknowledges his steadfast principles and dedication to democratic values. Former Rajya Sabha MP Adeeb highlights his administrative vision and community-oriented initiatives. Former chief minister M Veerappa Moily reflects on his inclusive outlook, while former minister Roshan Baig and Salar Publications Trustee Sadaqat Peeran recall his accessibility and personal warmth.

Adding a lyrical dimension to the film is a soulful ghazal rendered by Raghu Pati Jhai.

The documentary by Sabiha Zubair Khan stands as a historical record of a compassionate leader respected across political lines and ideologies.

Scan the QR code below to watch the documentary, streaming on Salar Urdu Digital Youtube from 15 February.

FROM 1 APRIL

No more cash payments? NH toll gates may go digital with FASTags, UPI

NEW DELHI, 20 FEB

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) is considering discontinuing cash payments at National Highway toll plazas from 1 April, 2026, making digital modes such as FASTag and UPI mandatory.

If implemented, all toll transactions across more than 1,150 fee plazas on National Highways and Expressways will be processed exclusively through RFID-enabled FASTag or the Unified Payments Interface (UPI). The move aims to create a fully digital tolling ecosystem, consolidate gains in electronic toll collection and improve operational efficiency and reliability. NHAI said over 98 per cent FASTag penetration has already transformed toll collection, enabling seamless and contactless movement. UPI facilities have also been operationalised at plazas nationwide.

—*PTI*

Under existing rules, vehicles without a valid FASTag paying in cash are charged twice the user fee, while UPI payments attract 1.25 times the applicable fee. Plaza-level assessments show cash transactions contribute to congestion, longer waiting times and disputes. A digital-only system is expected to improve lane throughput, and reduce delays. —*PTI*

—INSTA/TOXIC

Amid backlash, Yash releases teaser for 'Toxic'

BENGALURU, 20 FEB

The highly-anticipated teaser of 'Toxic: A Fairytale for Grown-Ups' starring Kannada star Yash has been released, showcasing a brutal, vibrant universe spanning Goa from the 1940s to the 1970s, amid backlash from Christain groups.

Directed by Geetu Mohandas, the film features Yash as Raya, a ruthless gangster, amid high-octane action sequences.

The teaser begins with a circus setting before shifting to an East Asian-inspired backdrop, portraying a dark, edgy atmosphere. Yash, also co-writer, is seen wielding knives, guns, and engaging in brutal violence, culminating with him delivering a dialogue on "manners" after a killing. The film is set for release on 19 March. It also stars Nayanthara, Huma Qureshi, Tara Sutaria, and Rukmini Vasanth. However, the National Christian Federation had written to the government and film authorities, asking them to step in before the film reaches cinemas, claiming the film portrays the Christian community in a damaging light. —*AGENCIES*

Man gets 7yrs RI for attacking cops in 2021

BENGALURU, 20 FEB

A court in Bengaluru has sentenced Mohammed Saleem to seven years of rigorous imprisonment and fined him Rs 25,000 in a 2021 attempt-to-murder case involving police officers. According to officials, Saleem was intercepted by police near the Forest Office at HBR Layout while travelling along the Ring Road from Hennur Signal towards Nagawara. Acting on credible information, officers stopped his car, following which he allegedly tried to flee and attacked them with a knife. A case was registered at Govindapura Police Station on 24 June, 2021 under charges of attempt to murder and relevant provisions of the Arms Act. After investigation and trial, the court found him guilty and imposed the seven-year sentence along with the fine. —*PTI*

CM calls for peace in Bagalkot after clashes

BJP says Hindus can't celebrate festivals, are being targeted

BENGALURU, 20 FEB

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah called for peace in Bagalkot after a stone pelting incident near a mosque as the BJP said there was a complete breakdown of law and order in the State and called the Congress anti-government.

"The stone-pelting incident in Bagalkot is a threat to the peace and harmony of the society. I and our government strongly condemn this," Siddaramaiah stated on X on Friday.

Siddaramaiah said that he had spoken to senior police officers and ordered them to conduct an impartial investigation.

"Providing a fear-free and peaceful life to the people of the country is our first priority. We will not tolerate any person or force that disturbs the peace and tranquility of the people," he wrote. "I urge everyone not to fall prey to rumours or provocation. Let us stand together to preserve peace and communal harmony in our State."

Security in Bagalkot after a stone pelting incident during a Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Jayanti procession passing near a masjid—*PTI*

However, the BJP slammed the Congress.

Law and order has completely collapsed in the government, State BJP President BY Vijayendra wrote on X.

"Attacks targeting Hindu festivals and processions look like a systematic conspiracy," he wrote.

Leader of Opposition in the Legislative Assembly R Ashoka echoed the sentiments, noting recent communal violence during Hindu festivals. He said there had been recent clashes during Ganesha Chaturti processions and Navratri processions.

One must ask if "Hindu religious practices have been banned," he wrote on X, and asked what Home Minister G Parameshwara was doing.

BJP MP Narayanasa Bandage called the Congress government "anti-Hindu".

—*Salar News with Agencies*

LARGEST OIL PAINTING?

Artist Zakir Hussain Khan painted Gumbad-e-Khizra (Green Dome) Al Madinah Al Munawara with oil on 17x20 metres of cloth, aiming to set a new Guinness World Record for the largest oil painting on the fabric, at Masjid e Qadriya Quddus, Sahed Eidgah, Millers Road, in Bengaluru on Friday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Journalists protest the government's curbs on reporters in the State Secretariat, at the Mahatma Gandhi statue in Vidhana Soudha, Bengaluru on Friday —*X/@BYVIJAYENDRA*

Journalists protest press restrictions in Vidhana Soudha

BENGALURU, 20 JAN

Dozens of journalists protested a recent government circular which restricted media access in the State Secretariat in front of the Mahatma Gandhi statue in Vidhana Soudha.

In a letter addressed to the Department of Information and Public Relations, the secretary of the Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms (DPAR) stated that the move was taken citing security concerns. Journalists were asked not to follow Ministers when they entered the building to record video statements, along with a slew of other directions.

The journalists said these restrictions would hamper their routine functioning and submitted a representation to KV Prabhakar, Media Advisor to the Chief Minister, who said their concerns would be looked into.

Opposition parties expressed support for the journalists, and condemned the Congress for restricting the freedom of media.

"The Congress government has already forgotten what transparent governance means," State BJP President BY Vijayendra wrote on X. "The government elected by the people should be accountable to the people, and should not try to bury the truth."

Urging the government to reconsider the ban, he added: "Looking down on the media, which is like a bridge of truth between the people and the system, and keeping journalists away under the pretext of security, is an insult to democratic governance."

Similarly, JD(S) State Youth President Nikhil Kumar stated on X that the Congress government was displaying an "authoritarian" attitude.

The JD(S) X handle expressed support for the protesting journalists and said that the government's restriction was a "blatant violation of freedom of expression", terming it as "cowardice".

—*Salar News with agencies*

Activist held for 'fake' posts on ex-MUDA head

BENGALURU, 20 FEB

Social activist Snehamayi Krishna was arrested for allegedly creating fake documents and uploading a fabricated audio clip on social media to defame a senior KAS officer.

Krishna, a resident of Mysuru, was taken into custody by the Central Crime Branch, police officials said.

The arrest followed an investigation into a complaint filed by DB Natesh, a senior Karnataka Administrative Service (KAS) officer and former Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA) commissioner.

A case was registered on 18 February at the Bengaluru City Cyber Crime Police Station.

According to police, Krishna allegedly created fake documents and an audio clip using the complainant's photograph and uploaded them on his Facebook account, carrying out a defamatory campaign and targeting the officer.

"During the investigation, evidence was collected from the complainant and social media platforms, and the audio clip uploaded on Facebook was examined," a statement from the office of Bengaluru police commissioner Seemant Kumar Singh said.

Following a court-issued search warrant, police conducted a search at the accused's residence and seized relevant documents, it said.

Police added that a notice had been issued to Krishna to appear before them, and he has been secured and is being questioned in connection with the case. —*PTI*

BMRCL launches probe into Yellow Line derailment

BENGALURU, 20 FEB

The BMRCL has initiated an internal investigation into the derailment of a Yellow Line train at its depot in January. According to BMRCL sources, a bogie derailed ahead of a trial run in mid-January. A six-member panel has been formed to examine the incident.

"The train was not on the main line; it was stationary at the depot. Due to human error, this happened. The panel will investigate the cause," a Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited official told PTI. He added that no damage occurred to the coach or the tracks.

Passenger safety is our top priority. Since this happened at the depot and not on the main line, there is no cause for panic, the officer said.

BMRCL plans to operate driverless trains on this stretch in the future. —*PTI*

Tiger safaris to start on 21 February

MYSURU, 20 FEB

Safari operations, suspended after the human-tiger conflict, will resume with conditions from 21 February, after Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre's issued an official directive on Friday.

Khandre reviewed the situation with officials from Mysuru, Kodagu and Chamarajanagar.

Only 50 per cent of the safari vehicles and staff in use prior to 7 November should be used Bandipur and Nagarahole

Tiger Reserve, Khandre stated.

"Operations should be conducted mainly through buses, with minimal use of campers and jeeps," he said.

Safari operations had been suspended for more than three months on 7 November after a series of human-wildlife conflict, including tiger attacks along the forest fringes of Mysuru – Chamarajanagar districts.

A 100-km stretch along the Bandipur boundary has been identified as highly sensitive, with 25 camps to be set up at 5km intervals, the minister's office stated. "Local residents will be appointed as 'forest friends' at each camp to monitor wildlife movement," Khandre said. —*Salar News*

Netherland PM Dick Schoof visited Traffic Management Center and met DGP/IGP MA Saleem, in Bengaluru, on Friday —*SALAR*

Financial anarchy: Ashoka on contractors' commissions row

BENGALURU, 20 FEB

BJP leader R Ashoka called the government "corrupt" and said the ruling Congress had caused "financial anarchy" over non-payment to the contractors. His comments on Friday come after PWD Minister Satish Jarkiholi said that commissions were there "today and will be there tomorrow".

The remarks come against the backdrop of protests announced by the Karnataka State Contractors Association (KSCA) had called for a strike 6 March, when the government is set to table the budget, over pending dues worth Rs 37,000 crore.

"Why are small contractors being crushed while a select few are favoured?" Ashoka alleged on X on Friday. "This is not governance. This is financial anarchy." The LoP in the Assembly said that if work stopped in April, the blame would fall on the Congress. —*Salar News*

Farmers call for agri benefits in Budget

MYSURU, 20 FEB

Badagalapura Nagendra, President of Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha and Hasiru Sene, called on the government to implement measures promoting agriculture and safeguarding farmers' interests, as Karnataka ranks second in farmer suicides nationwide.

Speaking to press on Friday, he stated his association had urged the CM Siddaramaiah to address 13 key demands at the pre-budget consultative meeting on 17 February.

The association requested for measures to prevent farmer suicides, especially among tobacco growers in Husnur, Periyapatna, Nanjangud, Gundlupet, and Araalgud, who are distressed over declining tobacco prices.

They also urged the government to buy ragi, jowar, tur dal, and millets at MSP and issue title deeds for land without hokum through necessary legislation.

Additionally, they demanded changes to the 2003 Land Acquisition Act for rural housing and called for promotion of natural and integrated farming practices to boost farmers' livelihoods. The association condemned the limited safaris permitted and urged measures to prevent man-animal conflict in Mysuru district. —*Salar News*

Netherlands PM visits B'luru traffic mgmt centre

BENGALURU, 20 FEB

Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Dick Schoof, on Friday visited the Traffic Management Centre here as part of his official City tour, police said.

Schoof, who arrived here on Thursday, was hosted by the Bengaluru Traffic Police at the TMC, they added.

The visit was attended by the State Director General and Inspector General of Police MA Saleem, Bengaluru City Police Commissioner Seemant Kumar Singh, and Joint Commissioner of Police (Traffic) Karthik Reddy, along with other senior officers, police said.

During the visit, senior officials showcased innovative initiatives and global best practices in traffic management, highlighting the City's focus on smarter and safer roads, according to a police statement.

The Prime Minister was briefed on advanced, technology-driven systems implemented to enhance road safety, streamline urban mobility, and ensure efficient enforcement.

The delegation also witnessed live demonstrations of real-time monitoring, AI-enabled surveillance, adaptive traffic signal control, and integrated command-and-control operations at the centre, officials added. —*PTI*

FIGHTING CYBER CRIME

68 arrested as mule bank accounts frozen in Karnataka

BENGALURU, 20 FEB

The Karnataka State Cyber Command has arrested 68 people as part of a drive against mule bank accounts and "mule herders," officials said on Friday.

The special operations, which have been continuing since last week across Karnataka, targeted networks engaged in aggregating and selling mule bank accounts used for cybercrimes.

The arrests were made between December 2025 and February 2026, police said in a report.

Police said the investigation identified a network of "mule herders" — individuals who

—AI

aggregate and misuse mule bank accounts — who were retailing and selling such accounts to cyber criminals.

A total of 68 accused and suspects have been arrested.

Mule herders had collected personal information and documents from unsuspecting laypersons and opened multiple bank accounts in the names of their relatives. "These accounts were operated in a business-like manner".

Police registered 60 cases and identified 869 mule accounts across the State. As many as 8,788 complaints were registered on the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal (NCRP) against the identified mule accounts.

The total money involved in all NCRP-linked crimes stood at Rs 85.05 crore, of which Rs 13.43 crore has been put on hold, the Cyber Command said. Police seized 35 ATM cards, 37 passbooks, 80 mobile phones, 28 cheque books and 22 SIM cards. — *PTI*

Son, sister held for govt officer's death in Tumakuru

TUMAKURU, 20 FEB

The police have arrested two people in the murder of an officer of the State Education Department in Chikkanayakanahalli Jogihalli of Tumakuru district.

KR Jayalakshmi was reportedly strangulated to death by her adopted son MS Channakeshava, 25 and sister Anasuya, 45, on 18 February.

The accused are being interrogated by the police.

As Jayalakshmi had no children, she adopted Anasuya's son Channakeshava and raised him. She had been residing with her partner Srinivas for the past 20 years.

The situation began to deteriorate when Anasuya and Chandrashekhar came to stay at Jayalakshmi's residence eight months ago. They allegedly pressured Srinivas to vacate the house.

Jayalakshmi then decided to shift to another house in Turuvekere and had even paid an advance rent for it. When Anasuya and Chandrashekhar learned about her decision, they allegedly murdered her.

The accused reportedly attempted to pass off her death as a heart attack and were preparing for the funeral. However, Srinivas grew suspicious and lodged a complaint with the police.

Police suspect property dispute to have been the motive behind the murder. A case has been registered.

Tumakuru superintendent of police Ashok KV told Salar News, "The duo allegedly strangled her over property disputes and a desire to secure a government job. They wanted Srinivas to leave the house." —*Salar News*

— WIKIPEDIA

Cong MLA takes 'contaminated water' to Assembly

GANDHINAGAR, 20 FEB

Congress MLA Shailesh Parmar caused a stir in the Gujarat Legislative Assembly after producing a bottle he claimed contained contaminated groundwater from near a waste processing site in Mahisagar district. The protest came during Question Hour after concerns were raised over alleged chemical contamination around the Jamiyatpura facility. Minister of State for Forest and Environment Pravin Mali said five complaints had been received in 2024 and 2025, but testing found no evidence of widespread or lasting pollution. Unconvinced, Parmar displayed a bottle of brown liquid as proof. Speaker Shankar Chaudhary rebuked him, ordered its removal, and warned members against bringing such items into the House. —*PTI*

Kerala hikes DA to 35% for govt staffs, pensioners

T'PURAM, 20 FEB

The Government of Kerala has raised Dearness Allowance (DA) for state government employees, local body staff, teachers, and aided educational institution employees from 25 per cent to 35 per cent. The revised rate will be paid with the March salary and applies to full-time and part-time contingent staff, part-time teachers and re-employed pensioners. Dearness Relief (DR) for state service, family and ex-gratia pensioners has also been increased, with payments due in April. Local bodies must meet the additional cost from their own funds. The hike does not apply to the Kerala State Electricity Board or the Kerala State Road Transport Corporation, which will issue separate orders. —*PTI*

MP cop suffers burns during Cong's protest

MAIHAR, 20 FEB

A traffic policeman suffered severe burn injuries in Madhya Pradesh's Maihar district on Friday after his uniform caught fire during Congress' effigy-burning protest targeted at some ministers. The police filed an FIR and launched an investigation into the incident. Traffic policeman, Vikram Pathak, who was on duty at that time, suffered severe burn injuries as petrol carried in a bottle by the protesters fell on his uniform and caught fire. Congress workers burnt an effigy at Agrasen Tiraha in Maihar, while raising slogans against the ministers. A stampede-like situation occurred, but the police soon intervened and brought everything under control. The injured policeman was immediately taken to the Maihar Civil Hospital, where he was undergoing treatment. —*PTI*

Congress-backed BJP rebel elected mayor of Bhiwandi

BHIWANDI, 20 FEB

Narayan Chaudhary, a BJP rebel who quit the party along with five colleagues, was elected mayor of Bhiwandi-Nizampur City Municipal Corporation on Friday with the backing of a Congress-led "secular front". The victory is seen as a setback for the BJP, which had performed strongly in recent local elections. In the 90-member corporation, Chaudhary won 48 votes in a show-of-hands poll. Shiv Sena's Vilas Patil secured 25 votes and BJP's Sneha Patil 16, with one independent abstaining. In the January 15 civic polls, Congress emerged as the largest party with 30 seats, followed by BJP (22), Shiv Sena (12), NCP-SP (12), Samajwadi Party (6), Konark Vikas Aghadi (4) and Bhiwandi Vikas Aghadi (3). —*PTI*

India-US interim trade pact to rollout in April

US doesn't want to see anyone buying Russian oil, says Gor

NEW DELHI, 20 FEB

An interim trade agreement between India and the US is likely to be signed in March and operationalised in April.

Disclosing this, Union Commerce and Industry Minister **Piyush Goyal** said on Friday that India's free trade agreements (FTAs) with the UK and Oman are likely to be implemented in April, followed by New Zealand in October.

A three-day meeting between Indian and American officials to finalise the legal text for an interim trade agreement will begin in the US on February 23, an official said on Friday.

Earlier this month, India and the US released a joint statement to announce that a framework for an interim trade agreement has been finalised.

The Indian and the US team will start their three-day meeting from Monday, the official said.

The Indian team will be headed by chief negotiator Darpan Jain, who is a joint secretary in the Commerce Ministry.

Under the interim trade pact, both sides would extend duty concessions to each other on several goods traded between them.

Addressing a joint press conference with US Under Secretary Jacob Helberg and White House adviser Mi-chael Kratsios, on the sidelines of the AI Impact Summit here, the US Ambassador Sergio Gor said the US Secretary of State Marco Rubio will visit India in the next few months. He said the US president wants the war between Russia and Ukraine to end.

Trump had earlier cited India's continued imports of Russian oil and slapped an additional 25 per cent trade tariff on New Delhi, bringing tariffs to a total of 50 per cent. He did not take similar punitive actions against China, though it remains the largest importer of Russian oil.

Asked about America's monitoring of Russian oil, Gor said, "We have seen India diversify on their oil. There is a commitment. This is not about India. The United States doesn't want anyone buying Russian oil. The President's been very clear on this: he wants this war to end," he said.

Further, on the trade deal with India, Gor said, "We're not dealing with a small country; this is one of the biggest economies. And so we're thrilled that the interim deal is done." —*PTI*

PM agreed to trade deal with US under 'choke', says RaGa

NEW DELHI, 20 FEB

Stepping up his attack on the government over the interim US trade deal, Congress leader **Rahul Gandhi** on Friday said the answer to why Prime Minister Narendra Modi agreed to a deal with the US, where India gives so much and appears to get so little, and makes an "abject surrender", lies in the "grips" and "chokes" placed on him.

The Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the Lok Sabha also claimed that with this deal, India is going to become a "data colony".

Gandhi, who has been attacking the BJP-led government and accusing it of a sell-out through the deal, posted a video on X in which he invoked his recent speech in Parliament in which he had drawn a Jiu-Jitsu analogy. —*PTI*

POST SIR EXERCISE

People arrive for physical verification to correct errors in their names in the electoral rolls under the SIR, in Prayagraj, on Friday —*ANI*

Gujarat, Puducherry, Lakshadweep have 69 lakh fewer voters

NEW DELHI, 20 FEB

The electorate in Gujarat, Lakshadweep and Puducherry shrunk by nearly 69 lakh after the completion of the special intensive revision of the voters' list, data shared by the Election Commission on Friday shows.

Gujarat, Lakshadweep and Puducherry recently published their respective final electoral rolls as part of the poll roll cleanup exercise.

Before SIR was announced on 27 October, 2025, the combined electorate of Gujarat and the two Union territories stood at 5.19 crore. After publication of the final rolls, their total voter base came down to 4.50 crore — a net change of 68.9 lakh.

In Gujarat, the electorate before SIR stood at 5.08 crore; it shrank to 4.40 crore -- a net change of 68.12 lakh. In percentage terms, a net change of 13.40 per cent.

In Lakshadweep, before the SIR exercise, the voter base stood at 57,813. But after the publication of the final electoral rolls, it went down to 57,607 — a net change of 206 electors. In percentage terms, a net change of 0.36 per cent.

In poll-bound Puducherry, the total number of electors before SIR was over 10.21 lakh. It shrunk to 9.44 lakh in final rolls — a net change of 7.57 per cent in percentage terms.

While the SIR, was completed in Bihar, it is ongoing in 12 states & Union territories with nearly 60 crore electors. —*PTI*

'Promoting Hindi strengthens all languages'

AGARTALA/CACHAR, 20 FEB

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday said promoting Hindi strengthens all other languages and dismissed claims that it is being imposed on people. Addressing the Rajbhasha Sammelan in Agartala, he said, "There can be no dispute between Hindi and other local languages since they are two sisters of the same mother who have progressed hand in hand." He urged parents to speak to their children in their mother tongue to preserve literature, tradition, and culture.

Shah highlighted development in the Northeast, stating that 21 peace accords with outlawed groups have been signed since 2014 and about 11,000 misguided youths have been reintegrated into the mainstream.

Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma, Union HM Amit Shah and Minister Atul Bora, during the launch of the Vibrant Villages Programme-II, in Assam—*PTI*

Later, Shah inspected the India-Bangladesh border in Assam's Cachar district at Nathanpur village, accompanied by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and senior BSF and government officials. He reviewed security arrangements, placed a wreath at the martyrs' memorial, inspected weapons, and planted a banyan tree near the border. Assam shares a 267.5-km boundary with Bangladesh across Dhubri, South Salmara-Mankachar, Cachar, and Karimganj districts.

He also announced that the Rs 4,000-crore new terminal of Guwahati's Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport will become operational from 22 February, with a capacity of 13.1 million passengers annually. —*PTI*

Facing max cases is badge of honour: Priyanka

GUWAHATI, 20 FEB

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Friday defended her brother Rahul Gandhi in a defamation case, contending that facing the "highest number of cases" has become a "badge of honour".

Vadra on Friday concluded her two-day visit to Assam after holding a series of meetings with senior party functionaries to finalise candidates for the upcoming Assembly elections.

Speaking at the party office here, Vadra said being targeted with multiple cases by different agencies was a sign of being on the "right track".

"This is the kind of politics where false cases are filed and people are exploited," she said.

Moreover, Vadra also criticised Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma for attacking Assam Congress President Gaurav Gogoi over alleged Pakistan links, saying that dragging his family and children into it is "wrong politics".

Gogoi is "a positive person, and wants to bring positivity in politics," she said.

Meanwhile, State Congress President Gaurav Gogoi had said the first list of candidates for the upcoming polls is likely to be released by the end of February, with 80 nominees expected to be announced by the first week of March.

At present, the ruling BJP holds 64 seats in the 126-member House. Its allies AGP, UPPL and BPF have nine, seven and three MLAs, respectively.

Congress General Secretary and Chairperson of the party's Assam Screening Committee Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, in Assam, on Friday —*PTI*

In the Opposition camp, the Congress has 26 MLAs, while the AIUDF has 15 and CPI(M) has one and an independent. —*PTI*

TVK rules out alliance with BJP

MADURAI, 20 FEB

Actor-Politician Vijay-led TVK on Friday asserted that the party would not forge an alliance with the BJP, despite what it described as mounting pressure from the saffron party.

Vijay had repeatedly said that his party would not force an alliance with BJP due to ideological differences. He also ruled out an alliance with the AIADMK.

"The BJP tried to apply pressure in many ways. It has even gone to the extent of Central Bureau of Investigations inquiry and stalling of Vijay's film Jananayagan.." TVK General Secretary (Policy and Propaganda) Arun Raj said.

Vijay had appeared before the CBI in Delhi on 21 January for questioning in connection with the Karur stampede that claimed 41 lives and left several injured.

Actor-Politician Vijay-led TVK under BJP pressure for alliance —*PTI*

Raj referred to Vijay's remarks made at a party event in Mahabalipuram, where Vijay ruled out any alliance with "communal forces".

Raj also said the DMK has allied with Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam (DMDK) due to the growing public support for TVK.

Tamil Nadu is gearing up for Assemble elections this year, with the main contest expected between the DMK and the AIADMK. The DMK-led alliance includes Indian National Congress, DMDK and others. AIADMK is leading the NDA, comprising of BJP, PMK and others. —*Agencies*

Political malice: RaGa appears in UP court for defamation case

SULTANPUR, 20 FEB

Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, who on Friday appeared before an MP-MLA court in Uttar Pradesh's Sultanpur on Friday in connection with a 2018 defamation case related to his remarks against Union Home Minister Amit Shah, termed it an act of 'political malice'.

Gandhi told the court of Special Judge Shubham Verma that the allegations against him were made out of political malice to destroy his image and that of his party, Gandhi's advocate Kashi Prasad Shukla said. The court fixed the next hearing on 9 March which Lok Sabha MP from Raebareli has been asked to furnish evidence in his defence, the lawyer said.—*PTI*

No place for 'hired voices' in Cong: Chennithala to Aiyar

KOCHI 20 FEB

Taking a dig at former Union minister **Mani Shankar Aiyar**, senior Congress leader Ramesh Chennithala on Friday said that "hired voices" like him have no place in the party.

Responding to Aiyar's attack on party leaders and his claim that CPI(M) leader Pinarayi Vijayan will continue as Kerala Chief Minister, Chennithala said the former minister is "politically irrelevant and holds no role or position in the Congress."

"Mani Shankar Aiyar and others like him are people whose time is over. They have no role in this party. They are not part of this party," he said.

"His position is that of someone who goes wherever he is hired. Whoever hires him, he goes there. That is nothing to be particularly respected," Chennithala added.

When asked whether Aiyar should be expelled, the Congress Working Committee member retorted that Aiyar "is not even in the party, so from where would he be expelled?"

Earlier this week, Aiyar visited Kerala at the invitation of the Left government and launched a verbal attack on his party colleagues, remarking that the Pinarayi Vijayan–led LDF would retain power in the state. —*PTI*

High-rise near INS: HC raps Navy over 'intelligence failure'

MUMBAI, 20 FEB

The Bombay High Court on Friday criticised the Indian Navy for an alleged "failure in intelligence," questioning how a contested high-rise near INS Shikra, the naval air station in Colaba, went unnoticed.

The bench of Justices Ravindra Ghuge and Abhay Mantri heard a petition filed by INS Shikra's Commanding Officer seeking to halt the building's construction, citing security risks. Reviewing photographs, the court noted multiple high-rises — some just a "stone's throw" from the station — already established or under construction. The bench questioned Navy's selective opposition to this project while ignoring other towers nearby.

Petitioner advocate RV Govilkar argued that the other buildings were constructed before the Ministry of Defence's 2011 circular, which mandated a No Objection Certificate (NOC) for tall structures near defence installations. Developers' senior counsel Janak Dwarkadas countered that the project's March 2011 commencement certificate predated the circular, so a naval NOC was unnecessary.

The court declined to extend its stay on construction, and scheduled the matter for a final hearing on 30 March. —*PTI*

EPSTEIN FILES ROW

Why are Puri, Anil not arrested: CPI(M)

NEW DELHI, 20 FEB

The CPI(M) on Friday criticised the government for not taking action against Indians named in the Epstein Files.

The party also demanded the removal of Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri. CPI(M) General Secretary MA Baby accused Puri, Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas, of "lying" in his press conference and said Prime Minister Narendra Modi should sack him immediately.

The party condemned the "repulsive and abhorrent" content of the Epstein Files, which expose a criminal network of politicians, financial elites, tech magnates and celebrities facilitated by convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

Congress leader Pawan Khera posted a poster on X alleging that Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri met Jeffrey Epstein 9 times between 5 June & 10 October 2014 —*X/@PAWANKHERAN*

CPI(M) alleged that despite clear evidence of involvement by Puri and industrialist Anil Ambani, the government has made no attempt to ensure accountability.

Congress on Tuesday also pressed Puri to explain "62 email exchanges" with Epstein between 2014 and 2017.

Congress leader Pawan Khera claimed there were nine meetings in 2014 alone and alleged Puri shared government policies with Epstein.

He demanded Puri resign before clarifying the matter, adding that Puri had "proven himself wrong by telling one lie after another".

Puri has denied wrongdoing, stating his interactions with Epstein were limited to just four professional meetings.

The Epstein Files, released by the US Justice Department, include travel logs, recordings and correspondence, and have generated global attention since Epstein's death in 2019. —*Salar News*

— ANI

Cow vigilante Bittu loses Rs 30K in marriage scam

FARIDABAD, 20 FEB

Cow vigilante Bittu Bajrangi was allegedly duped of Rs 30,000 by a man claiming to arrange his marriage, police said. An FIR has been filed against the accused, Bunty, and his associates based on Bajrangi's complaint. Bajrangi, involved in the 2023 Nuh riots, told Bunty he wanted to marry and asked for help finding a match. Bunty introduced him to Rani, and arranged meetings in Aligarh. On 5 September, 2025, Bunty and Rani visited Bajrangi's home with a woman for marriage, which Bajrangi believed was fixed for 7 February, 2026. Bajrangi transferred Rs 30,000 for clothes, but the accused disappeared when he arrived in Aligarh, with Bajrangi's wedding plans ruined. —PTI

Shakira to perform for 'Feeding India Concert 2026'

NEW DELHI, 20 FEB

Global pop icon Shakira, popular for global chart-busters like "Hips Don't Lie," "Whenever Wherever" and "Waka Waka (This Time for Africa)," is all set to perform in Delhi and Mumbai this April for the Feeding India Concert 2026. The Colombian superstar is highly popular in India. She will lead the shows in Mumbai on 10 April and in Delhi on 15 April. Feeding India, a not-for-profit organisation and District by Zomato, is organising the third edition of the Feeding India Concert 2026. The shows are presented by HSBC India, produced and ticketed by District by Zomato. —PTI

Man stabbed by wife over TV volume in Andhra

AMARAVATI, 20 FEB

A 27 year-old man asking his wife to reduce the TV volume here proved fatal after she stabbed him, ultimately leading to his death, police said on Friday. Mangalagiri sub-divisional police officer Murali Krishna said Kranthi, 25, allegedly stabbed Sheikh Ahmed on Thursday over the television volume issue. Krishna told PTI that the couple married eight months ago. According to police, Ahmed died while undergoing treatment. Following the incident, the victim's mother lodged a police complaint accusing her daughter-in-law of stabbing her son for being asked to lower the TV volume. Police registered a case of murder and are now in the process of arresting Kranthi. —PTI

— PTI

Bengali author 'Shankar' dies at 93

KOLKATA, 20 FEB

Prominent Bengali author Mani Shankar Mukhopadhay, known as 'Shankar', died in hospital here on Friday, family confirmed. The 93-year-old author had been unwell for some time. He is survived by two daughters. Mukhopadhay's novels, including 'Chowringee', explored urban life and society's complexities, making him one of Bengali literature's most popular writers. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee expressed condolences, describing him as a "towering literary figure". She added that his writings would continue to inspire generations. His death marks the loss of a significant voice in Bengal's cultural landscape. —PTI

Love jihad: Gujarat govt to amend marriage rules

Innocent women being trapped, says Deputy CM Sanghavi

GANDHINAGAR, 20 FEB

The Gujarat government on Friday announced its plans to amend the rules framed under the Gujarat Registration of Marriages Act, saying the move is aimed at plugging loopholes in the existing system.

Speaking in the Assembly, Deputy Chief Minister Harsh Sanghavi stressed the need for new norms, alleging that "innocent women are being trapped."

He said several people had urged the government to amend the marriage registration rules to prevent misuse of procedural gaps.

Referring to what he termed as "love jihad," Sanghavi asserted that the BJP government could no longer ignore the issue.

He said objections and suggestions regarding the proposed amendments are now invited from the public for 30 days.

"The public can register their suggestions and opinions on the Health and Family Welfare Department's website," he said.

Later, the minister's office released a document detailing the procedure for marriage registration under the amended rules.

As per the proposed rules, every marriage application will have to be submitted before the Assistant Registrar, and applicants must attach a declaration stating whether the bride and the groom have informed their parents about the marriage.

Moreover, the bride and groom will have to provide the names, addresses, Aadhaar and contact details of their parents. The parents of the bride and groom will be informed within 10 working days.

The Assistant Registrar will forward the application to the Registrar of the district or taluka concerned. The marriage will be registered 30 days after the Registrar is satisfied that all the requirements rules have been met. — PTI

As per the new rules, all marriage applicants must attach a declaration on whether they have informed their parents about their marriage —ANI

JUNKS PLEA FOR BAN

SC: Mosques can be named after Babur

NEW DELHI, 20 FEB

The Supreme Court refused to entertain a plea on Friday seeking a direction to restrain the construction, establishment or naming of any mosque or religious structure in the name of Mughal emperor Babur or Babri Masjid.

After a bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta showed its disinclination in entertaining the plea, the counsel appearing for the petitioner withdrew it.

The counsel appearing for the petitioner referred to suspended Trinamool Congress MLA Humayun Kabir's announcement to construct a replica of the Babri Masjid in West Bengal's Murshidabad district. He said the petitioner was against the construction of mosques named after "invaders" in this country.

The counsel said Kabir had "announced the construction of a Babri Masjid replica in Murshidabad despite the fact that Babur was an "invader." The plea sought a direction to the Centre and states to consider the petitioner's case for banning the construction, establishment or nam.ing of any mosque or religious structure after Babur or Babri Masjid or any other names derived from that across India. — PTI

SC: End YSRCP MLC's trial before 30 Nov

Observing that the Andhra Pradesh Police is in "complete collusion" with those in power, the Supreme Court ordered on Friday that the trial against YSRCP MLC Anantha Satya Udaya Bhaskara Rao in a 2022 case of murder should conclude by 30 November 2026. Rao, an MLC of the then ruling YSRCP, is accused of killing his former driver Veedhi ubramanyam, a Dalit, over a financial dispute in May 2022 in Kakinada. The SC asked the Andhra Pradesh HC CJ to entrust the trial to a senior judge. —PTI

— PTI

Janakpuri accident victim's kin says no one helped her

NEW DELHI, 20 FEB

Mercy Xavier, an elderly woman, recounted her distress after her six-year-old granddaughter was fatally injured when a car rammed into their e-rickshaw in Janakpuri, West Delhi.

Xavier said she pleaded for help as her granddaughter lay bleeding. She explained that on 17 February, she was taking her granddaughter to school when, near the Janakpuri Fire Station, a white car collided with them, causing the vehicle to topple.

She asked the driver to help her child, but he fled. Her daughter received a call from hospital staff about her daughter's critical condition and her pleas to the public that went unheard.

Despite efforts to flag down vehicles, no one stopped; it was a nurse who later transported the girl to hospital. The girl was initially taken to Mata Chanan Devi Hospital, then shifted to a more advanced medical facility in Dwarka, where she died during treatment. Police seized the car and arrested the driver, Sanjeev. Witness statements and CCTV footage are being examined to reconstruct the incident. — PTI

I was arrested as I opposed entry of women, says Sabarimala priest

KOLLAM, 20 FEB

Sabarimala Tantri Kandararu Rajeevaru has linked his arrest in the alleged gold loss cases at the shrine to his stand during the 2018 women's temple entry row, claiming that his stand at the time had angered many.

Rajeevaru, who was the 16th accused in the alleged loss of gold from the Dwarapalaka (guardian deity) and the 13th accused in the alleged loss of gold from the doorframes of the Sreekovil (sanctum sanctorum), was recently granted bail by the Kollam Vigilance Court. The bail order referred to arguments raised by the chief priest's counsel during the hearing, including reference to the 2018 Sabarimala row, when the government, after an SC order, permitted the entry of menstrual age women into the temple. The Tantri argued that while officiating rituals during the period when some people tried to allow the entry of women of a certain age group, he had taken a strong stand to protect traditions and had threatened not to conduct religious ceremonies if attempts were made to tamper with tradition.

He that when there were attempts to keep Sabarimala open on all days, he had objected citing the deity's "Nithya Brahmachari" status. — PTI

Sabarimala Tantri Kandararu Rajeevaru said that his strong defence of traditions had offended the administration —ANI

Delhi HC asks Jaideep to surrender

NEW DELHI, 20 FEB

The Delhi High Court asked Jaideep Sengar, the brother of Unnao rape case convict Kuldeep Sengar, to surrender before jail authorities in connection with his conviction in the custodial death case of the survivor's father.

Justices Navin Chawla and Ravinder Dudeja was hearing a plea on Friday by the convict for extension of his interim bail after the suspension of the 10-year sentence.

It observed that the interim bail granted to Jaideep Sengar in July 2024 was last extended in April 2025 and since then, in spite of five dates, no order of any extension has been passed by the court. As the r counsel for Jaideep Sengar urged the bench to extend the period of his release on account of his health, the bench said, "You surrender and then we will see."

"Although there is no extension of interim suspension of sentence granted, we find he has still not surrendered. Before we proceed to consider his application for extension of the suspension of sentence, we require the appellant to surrender," the bench ordered. The senior counsel for Sengar assured the court that he would surrender by Saturday. — PTI

Forceps found in Kerala patient's stomach

KOCHI, 20 FEB

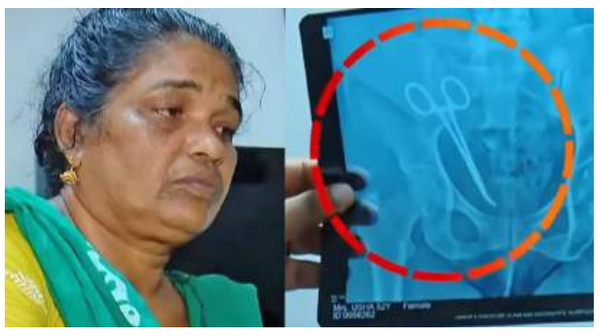
An artery forceps was discovered inside the abdomen of a woman from Punnapra, five years after she underwent surgery at Alappuzha Medical College in Vandanam, triggering official inquiries and allegations of negligence.

Usha Joseph had a major operation on 12 May 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic, to remove an ovarian tumour. She was discharged three days later, but according to her family, continued to suffer abdominal pain. A X-ray taken after she consulted a doctor outside the hospital reportedly revealed the presence of forceps.

Joseph has since been admitted to a private hospital in Kochi for its removal. Her family has decided to lodge a complaint with the Ambalapuzha police, alleging medical negligence and denial of compensation.

Medical College Principal Dr B Padmakumar said a preliminary inquiry found that protocols were followed, although he acknowledged possible lapses. Hospital authorities ruled out that the instrument was left after surgery.

Retired surgeon Dr Lalithambika denied performing the procedure and rejected allegations of wrongdoing. — PTI



Usha Joseph (left) and the surgical instrument that was detected in an X-Ray —SCREENGRAB

3-yr-old raped, killed in Gurugram

GURUGRAM, 20 FEB

A three-year-old girl was allegedly raped and strangled to death in Sector 37 by her neighbour, who lured the toddler away from her home in a village nearby, officials said on Friday.

Police have arrested the accused, who confessed to the crime during interrogation, they said.

On Thursday night, police received a complaint that a minor girl was missing in Mohammadpur Jharsa village, with the family alleging that a man living in the neighbourhood lured her away.

Police arrested the accused, a native of Bihar who worked as a scrap collector in Gurugram, within an hour of filing an FIR at the Sector 37 police station. "The accused said that late on Thursday, he lured the minor girl to a secluded place in Sector 37, where he first raped and then strangled her," a police spokesperson said.

4 HELD FOR GANGRAPE

Meanwhile, in Jharkhand's Gumla district four people were arrested for allegedly abducting and raping two girls, police said on Friday.

The incident occurred on Wednesday in Kamdara when the two girls, along with their two friends, were returning home from a marriage. — PTI

Live-in partner brutally attacks Gurugram woman

GURUGRAM, 20 FEB

A 19-year-old female student was beaten up brutally by her live-in partner here and was admitted to AIIMS Delhi in a critical condition, police said Friday. Police have arrested the accused partner, identified as Shivam, 19, a resident of Delhi.

The victim, a native of North Tripura, was a biotechnology student at the GD Goenka University in Gurugram.

The couple met in September 2025 and had been living together in Sector 69 for the last few months. Discussions were underway between the families regarding their marriage. On Thursday night, the couple had an altercation after which the accused assaulted the woman, severely injuring her. The woman was rescued by police, who reached the PG room after receiving a call from the woman's mother late on Thursday night to report the incident.

"Investigations revealed that the accused had developed doubts about his live-in partner's character. The accused, Shivam, is being interrogated. We have also collected evidence from the spot and are examining CCTV footage," said DCP Hitesh Yadav. — PTI

CBFC, 'Kerala Story 2' makers get HC notices

KOCHI, 20 FEB

The Kerala HC has issued notices to the producers of 'The Kerala Story 2 – Goes Beyond,' the CBFC, and the Centre over a petition seeking to quash its certification and demanding modifications.

The petition, filed by Sreedev Namboodiri of Kannur, claims the film was certified without proper statutory compliance under the Cinematograph Act, 1952.

The petitioner alleges the film's trailer portray women from multiple states but label them as 'The Kerala Story,' falsely linking them to terrorism, forced conversions, and demographic aggression.

The petition notes that the first part of the film caused controversy over alleged false claims, which were noted by the Supreme Court. Despite this, the CBFC granted certification.

The petitioner requested the court to quash the certification, suspend the film's release scheduled for 27 February, and demanded the reconsideration of the title and disclaimers to prevent regional vilification. — PTI

— PTI

'KERALA STORY 2'

SFI to protest against film with beef fest

THIRU,PURAM, 20 FEB

MSF, the student wing of IUML, called for boycotting 'Kerala Story 2', but questioned the 'beef fest' being organised by the SFI to protest against the film.

C K Najaf, the state general secretary of the Muslim Students Federation (MSF), opposed the event and said, in a Facebook post, that it might hurt the religious sentiments of Hindus. The district committee of the SFI, the CPI(M)'s student outifit, is holding the fest at the Manaveeyam Veedhi here at 6 pm, its state president M Sivaprasad said.

Questioning the same, Najaf claimed that holding such an event might hurt the sentiments of Hindus who are not pro-RSS, but do not eat beef for religious or personal reasons.

MSF Kerala General Secretary Najaf said that holding a beef fest can hurt the sentiments of Hindus who are not pro-RSS, but do not eat beef —PTI

The issue assumes importance as there is a scene, according to trailers, in the movie 'Kerala Story 2: Goes Beyond' where a character is force-fed beef. It is in protest against this that the SFI is holding the beef fest.

- Najaf said that just as the ban on beef is a violation of human rights, forcing people to eat beef or any other food is also a violation of basic human rights

Najaf that by holding such a fest the sentiments of Hindus for whom beef is forbidden should not be hurt as not all believers are in the RSS.

Just as the beef ban is a violation of human rights, putting people in a situation where they are forced to eat beef is also a violation of human rights, Najaf said. He also said that there were many other ways to protest against the movie without holding such a fest. — PTI

HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY

In a rare act of honesty, Faridabad scrap dealer Haji Akhtar Khan returned gold jewellery worth Rs 15 lakh to the Sharma family, who had accidentally sold it as junk during pre-Deepavali cleaning. Six months after collecting the scrap, Khan discovered 100g of gold wrapped in paper while rummaging through his warehouse and immediately informed the police. The Sharmas had hidden the jewellery in the scrap sack before leaving for Kumbh Mela last January and forgotten about it. The story has made Khan a social media sensation, while the grateful Sharmas hailed him as a living example of honesty —PTI

IMF Chief: AI to hit 40% of jobs, entry-level roles at risk

Artificial Intelligence is poised to disrupt 40 per cent of jobs worldwide, with entry-level roles most at risk, the head of the International Monetary Fund has warned, likening the transformation to "a tsunami hitting labour markets".

Speaking at the AI Summit on Friday, IMF managing director Kristalina Georgieva cited IMF-backed research showing that around 40 per cent of the global workforce will be exposed to AI-driven change. In advanced economies, that figure could rise to 60 per cent. For India, it is projected at about 26 per cent, she said to NDTV

"Our conclusion is we are falling behind the demand of transformation that comes with AI, in terms of appropriate policies to prepare people for what is already here today," she said.

The IMF's latest analysis of millions of online job vacancies underlines the scale of the shift. One in 10 job postings in advanced economies and one in 20 in emerging markets now require at least one new skill. Professional, technical and managerial roles show the strongest demand, particularly in information technology, which accounts for more than half of all new-skill requirements.

Sector-specific capabilities are also evolving. Healthcare employers increasingly seek expertise in telecare and digital health. Marketing roles now frequently demand proficiency in social media and data-driven targeting. As automation replaces certain tasks, entirely new ones are emerging alongside it.

For workers, however, the transition is creating understandable anxiety. "Who gets squeezed?" Georgieva asked. "The category of jobs we worry particularly about, and there is evidence this is already happening, are entry-level roles. These are usually tasks that can be easily automated … and what does this mean for young graduates looking for their first jobs?"

Emerging evidence from the US suggests generative AI adoption is already reducing entry-level hiring, especially where routine tasks can be automated. IMF research shows employment in AI-vulnerable occupations is 3.6 per cent lower after five years in regions with high demand for AI skills compared with regions with lower demand.

The impact is uneven across skill levels. High-skill and low-skill workers appear to benefit the most from new technology, while middle-skill roles – such as routine office jobs – are being squeezed.

Yet the picture is not entirely bleak. Employers are paying a premium for emerging skills. In the UK and the US, job postings requiring at least one new skill offer wages roughly 3 per cent higher. Roles demanding four or more new skills command significantly larger premiums – up to 15 per cent more in the UK and 8.5 per cent more in the US.

These wage gains can ripple through local economies. In the US, regions that saw a one percentage point rise in the share of job postings requiring new skills experienced a 1.3 per cent increase in employment over the past decade, as higher earnings boosted local spending and hiring.

India faces its own distinct challenge. As the world's most populous country, it adds millions to its workforce every year. Between 2023 and 2024 alone, 19.01 million people joined the labour force. Although the IMF estimates that 26 per cent of Indian jobs are exposed to AI – lower than in advanced economies – the sheer scale of its workforce means the stakes are high.

Countries such as Brazil, Mexico and Sweden show high demand for new skills but relatively limited supply, suggesting a need for greater investment in training and education, particularly in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. They may also need to rely more on foreign-born skilled workers.

By contrast, Australia, Ireland and Poland possess abundant talent but comparatively weaker demand. Their challenge is to stimulate innovation, encourage new firms and improve access to finance so businesses can absorb available skills.

Emerging and low-income economies, where both supply and demand remain limited, will require a combination of education reform and policies that drive innovation.

More broadly, the IMF argues that governments must redesign education systems for an AI-driven era. Students will need cognitive, creative and technical skills that complement AI rather than compete with it. Workers at risk of displacement must have access to retraining and lifelong learning.

Other policy priorities include improving social protection for those in transition, promoting labour mobility through affordable housing and flexible work, and strengthening competition policy to prevent excessive market concentration as firms acquire rivals to secure scarce talent.

Some countries are already better positioned.

Finland, Ireland and Denmark rank highly on the IMF's Skill Readiness Index, reflecting sustained investment in tertiary education and lifelong learning programmes. —*Salar News*

IMF Chief Kristalina Georgieva poses in front of Humayun's Tomb in New Delhi —PTI

SALAR سالار

'Half the antibiotics used for surgeries are inappropriate'

Inappropriate antibiotic prescribing around the time of surgery and long-term prescribing in aged care are among a mixed bag of findings of a recent report into antibiotic use and resistance in Australia.

The report shows while fewer antibiotics are prescribed in the community than a decade ago, there is still room to improve antibiotic prescribing in hospitals.

Here's why antibiotic resistance is so concerning and what the latest report tells us.

—PIXABAY

WHY IS ANTIBIOTIC USE AND RESISTANCE IMPORTANT?

Antibiotics are important medicines that treat bacterial infections. But using them too much, using the wrong one, or using them when they aren't needed can cause antibiotic resistance.

In hospitals, many patients have serious infections, including infections that are already resistant to antibiotics. Doctors must treat very sick patients quickly, but they also need to avoid giving antibiotics unnecessarily.

In the community, such as at GP clinics, doctors decide whether a patient really needs antibiotics or if they will recover on their own without them.

For one person, the risk of resistance might seem small. But when many people use antibiotics incorrectly, it increases the overall risk in the population.

Antibiotic resistance happens when bacteria change in a way that allows them to survive antibiotic treatment. These resistant bacteria continue to grow and spread, making infections harder to treat.

This happens because of selection pressure — antibiotics kill sensitive bacteria, but resistant bacteria survive and multiply.

WHY ARE ANTIBIOTICS USED IN SURGERY?

Antibiotics are mostly used around the time of surgery as one way to prevent, rather than treat, an infection.

They are generally needed only for procedures where there is a higher risk of infection and for a short period (mostly a single dose before surgery or for up to 24 hours afterwards).

This report shows that just under half (42.7 per cent) of antibiotic use for surgical procedures was not appropriate. The main areas that we need to work on are:

1. only using antibiotics for surgery where there is a high risk of infection
2. the time we administer the antibiotic dose, ideally within an hour before the skin is cut
3. the choice of antibiotic – sufficient to cover the organisms that could cause infection, but not unnecessarily broad that it may cause side effects or antibiotic resistance.

Inappropriate antibiotic use in surgery may have several consequences.

Giving the antibiotic at the wrong time (too early, or too late) reduces its effectiveness. Giving it for surgery where there is a low risk of infection, or for too long unnecessarily exposes patients to the risk of antibiotic side effects such as diarrhoea, as well as increasing the risk of antibiotic resistance.

HOW ABOUT AGED-CARE FACILITIES?

The report shows residents of aged-care homes receive high amounts of antibiotics.

Two striking statistics were that four in five residents (79.5 per cent) received at least one antibiotic prescription each year. About one in three patients (34.7 per cent) were given an antibiotic for more than six months.

Aged-care residents are at a higher risk of developing infections and it can sometimes be harder to spot the signs and symptoms of an infection.

So using antibiotics to prevent infection can sometimes be appropriate but should be a last resort. This is because infections that "break through" to cause infection despite preventative antibiotics are more likely to be resistant.

WHAT ELSE DID THE REPORT FIND?

The report also included critical antimicrobial resistances. These microorganisms are a serious threat to some of our last-line antibiotics. These are very difficult to treat and require specialised antibiotics and medical care. The reported number of these organisms more than doubled from 2022, to 3,389, or more than nine cases each day, in 2024. The report also highlights that many of these organisms are acquired overseas, reinforcing the regional and global context of antibiotic resistance.

HOW CAN WE FIGTHR THE RESISTANCE?

This latest report reinforces that we should:

1. Raise awareness that many infections will get better by themselves, and don't necessarily need antibiotics.
2. For aged-care residents, regularly review medications, including antibiotics, and check if they are still needed
3. Use the antibiotics we have more appropriately and for as short a time as possible, supported by appropriate oversight in hospitals, and at state and national levels
4. Continue to monitor for infections due to resistant bacteria to inform control policies
5. Reduce cross-transmission of resistant organisms in hospitals and in the community
6. Prevent infections by other means, such as clean water, sanitation, hygiene and vaccines
7. Continue to develop new antibiotics and alternatives to antibiotics, and ensure the right incentives are in place to encourage a continuous pipeline of new antibiotics. —*PTI*

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

TikTok, Meta finally in the hot seat for social media addiction in kids

Social media giants that have long rejected claims they harm children's mental health are now being forced to defend themselves in courtrooms across the United States.

Companies including Meta and TikTok face a wave of federal and state lawsuits seeking to hold them responsible for alleged damage to young users. The cases have been brought by school districts, local and state authorities, the federal government and thousands of families.

Two major trials are under way in Los Angeles and New Mexico, with more scheduled. The legal battles mark the culmination of years of scrutiny over whether deliberate design choices, from algorithmic recommendations to endless scrolling, make platforms addictive and expose children to harmful content linked to depression, eating disorders and suicide.

Legal experts say the moment resembles the early cases against the tobacco and opioid industries. Plaintiffs hope social media firms could face outcomes similar to cigarette manufacturers and pharmaceutical companies, including heavy financial penalties and mandated operational reforms.

The stakes are high. Adverse rulings could test companies' reliance on First Amendment protections and Section 230 of the 1996 Communications Decency Act, which shields platforms from liability for content posted by users. The financial cost of legal fees and potential settlements could be substantial. Companies may also be forced to alter core features of their platforms, potentially affecting user numbers and advertising revenue.

THE LA CASE: ADDICTION IN DOCK

In Los Angeles, jurors have begun hearing what is expected to be a lengthy and closely watched trial. At its centre is a 20-year-old identified only as "KGM". His case, alongside two others, has been selected as a bellwether, effectively a test trial designed to indicate how thousands of similar claims might fare before a jury.

The two remaining defendants are Meta and YouTube.

Matthew Bergman, of the Seattle-based Social Media Victims Law Centre, which represents more than 1,000 plaintiffs, described the proceedings as "a monumental inflection point in social media". When the litigation began four years ago, he said, few believed it would reach trial.

This week Meta's chief executive, Mark Zuckerberg, took the stand. He reiterated that the company bars children under 13 and works to identify users who lie about their age. Questioned about whether addictive products are used more frequently, he replied: "I'm not sure what to say to that. I don't think that applies here."

Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg leaves after testifying in a landmark trial over whether social media platforms deliberately addict and harm children on Wednesday in Los Angeles —PTI

Plaintiffs argue the opposite: that features are engineered to maximise engagement and that companies were aware of risks to young users but prioritised growth.

New Mexico: sexual exploitation allegations

In New Mexico, the focus is different but equally serious. The state's attorney general, Raul Torrez, sued Meta in 2023. Investigators posed as children online, documenting sexual solicitations they received and the company's response.

Torrez is seeking stricter age verification measures, stronger action against offenders and changes to algorithms that recommend content. He has also criticised end-to-end encryption, arguing it can hinder monitoring intended to protect children.

Meta counters that encrypted messaging is widely encouraged as a privacy and security safeguard by various authorities. In opening statements, prosecutors alleged that Meta knowingly designed its systems to keep young people online despite the risk of exploitation.

SCHOOLS TAKE ON SILICON VALLEY

Another significant trial is scheduled for the summer in Oakland, California, before US District Judge Yvonne Gonzalez Rogers. Six public school districts will serve as bellwether plaintiffs in what is known as multidistrict litigation.

Jayne Conroy, part of the plaintiffs' legal team and previously involved in opioid litigation, argues that addiction is again central. She says the case hinges on the vulnerability of children's developing brains and the dopamine-driven feedback loops that encourage prolonged use.

Drawing parallels with opioid cases, she contends that companies knew of the risks, downplayed them and continued to pursue engagement and advertising revenue. "They doubled down to get profits from advertisers over the safety of kids," she said. "And kids were harmed and kids died."

During testimony, Zuckerberg maintained that existing scientific research has not conclusively proven that social media causes mental health harm. Some researchers agree that "addiction" may not be the most accurate term, and social media addiction is not recognised as a formal disorder in the psychiatric community's diagnostic manual.

A LONG ROAD AHEAD

Nevertheless, pressure is mounting from parents, schools, academics and lawmakers. Analysts note that while companies have introduced new safety features, critics argue they continue to court teenage users aggressively and do not always enforce their own rules consistently.

Any resolution is likely to take years. Appeals and settlement negotiations could prolong proceedings, and sweeping regulatory reform in the United States has progressed slowly compared with Europe and Australia. Lobbying by technology firms, enforcement challenges and political disagreement have all impeded comprehensive legislation. —*PTI*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Venezuela grants amnesty to political prisoners

CARACAS, 20 FEB

Venezuela's acting President Delcy Rodriguez has signed an amnesty bill that could free hundreds of political prisoners, acknowledging past imprisonments. The legislation aims to grant amnesty for crimes since 1999, including acts during the 2024 elections. It excludes human rights violations, war crimes, or armed actions against Venezuela. Opposition figures welcomed the move, with Nora Bracho calling it a "great step forward for reconciliation". Critics like Pedro Urruchurtu condemned the law, calling it an illegitimate trap. Prisoners' families, frustrated by slow releases, called on external pressure, such as Marielis Guzmán condemning authorities for abuse of power *—PTI*

Trade agreement: US-Indonesia retain 19% tariffs

WASHINGTON, 20 FEB

The White House announced a reciprocal trade agreement with Indonesia on Thursday, as President Prabowo Subianto attended the first meeting of President Donald Trump's Board of Peace. Under the deal, Indonesia will eliminate tariffs on 99 per cent of American goods, while the US will keep tariffs on most Indonesian goods at 19 per cent, the same rate set for Cambodia and Malaysia. Indonesia also agreed to address non-tariff barriers and remove restrictions on exports of critical minerals and industrial commodities. Eleven deals worth USD 38.4 billion were signed, covering US soybean, corn, cotton, wheat purchases, cooperation on critical minerals, oil recovery, and joint ventures in computer chips. *—PTI*

Israeli settlers kill Palestinian American teen

MUKHMAS, 20 FEB

Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank shot and killed a Palestinian American man during an attack on a village, the Palestinian Health Ministry and a witness said Thursday. Raed Abu Ali said settlers attacked a farmer on Wednesday, prompting clashes after residents intervened. Israeli forces later arrived, and armed settlers killed 19-year-old Nasrallah Abu Siyam and injured several others. Abu Ali said the army fired tear gas, sound grenades and live ammunition. The military acknowledged using "riot dispersal methods" but denied firing. "When the settlers saw the army, they were encouraged and started shooting live bullets," Abu Ali said. A US embassy spokesperson said they "condemn this violence." *—PTI*

Islamic militant attacks kill 33 in northwest Nigeria

ABUJA, 20 FEB

At least 33 people have been killed after Islamic militants launched simultaneous attacks on a district in northwest Nigeria, according to the police. The attack took place on Wednesday in the Biu community of Kebbi state, police spokesman Bashir Usman said in a statement late Thursday night. The assailants crossed from Sokoto state, parts of which are occupied by the Lakurawa insurgent group, Usman said. "Preliminary investigations confirm that armed Lakurawa militants entered the area to rustle cattle," he said, adding that security personnel have been deployed to maintain order. sNorthern Nigeria faces a complex security crisis involving Islamic militants and armed gangs. Earlier this week, the military announced 100 US troops had arrived to help train forces. *—PTI*

Iran threatens US bases after Trump's 'deadline'

Netanyahu warns Ayatollahs of 'unimaginable consequences'

Tehran/Washington, 20 FEB

Amir Saeid Iravani, Iran's Envoy to the UN warned that any "military aggression" by the US would trigger a regional war, in a letter to the UN Security Council (UNSC). Condemning US President Donald Trump's recent comments, Iravani said that the UNSC must not allow "threats of force to be legitimised"

Trump had earlier given Iran around 10 days to negotiate a nuclear deal with the US, warning of "bad things" if they failed to comply. Iravani said that the Islamic Republic has approached all negotiations in good faith and sought to pursue diplomatic channels.

He took exception to Trump slamming the UK for leasing the Diego Garcia airbase to Mauritius. Trump had said the US may need the airbase if Iran did not make a deal. UK media reported that the London has barred the US from using its airbases to strike Iran, but there was no official confirmation.

"Such a belligerent statement by the President of the US... signals a real risk of military aggression, the consequences of which would be catastrophic for the region and would constitute a grave threat to international peace and security." Iravani stated.

The comments come amid a massive buildup of US military assets in the region – the highest since its invasion of Iraq in 2003 *—XCENTCOM*

He said that such statements risk throwing the "region into a new cycle of crisis and instability."

If Iran was attacked, he stated that the Islamic Republic retains the right to self defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter. All American bases in the Middle would be legitimate targets, he stated, while asking the UNSC to reign in Trump.

"The US would bear full and direct responsibility for any unpredictable and uncontrolled consequences," he wrote.

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated that "if the Ayatollahs make a mistake and attack us, they will face a response that they can't even imagine". Israel, Netanyahu said, was a model ally of the US.

The comments come amid a massive buildup of US military assets in the region – the highest since its invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Meanwhile, Poland Prime Minister Donald Tusk told all Polish citizens to leave the country immediately, saying that the threat of military aggression was real.

—Salar News with Agencies

US DEAL MAY ALLOW SAUDI TO ENRICH URANIUM

DUBAI, 20 FEB

Under a proposed nuclear deal with the US, Saudi Arabia could have ranium enrichment. This comes amid the standoff between Iran and US. The deal could be worth billions of dollars.

US Presidents Donald Trump and former president Joe Biden have both tried to reach a nuclear deal with the kingdom. Experts warn that this kind of deal could lead to a weapons program for the kingdom. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman would need this if Iran obtains nuclear weapons.

After Israel bombed Qatar last year, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan signed a defence pact.

Pakistan warned it would use nuclear weapons if Saudi territory were attacked. Reportedly, Trump's administration is seeking 20 nuclear business deals with nations across the globe.

Saudi is a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency, which allows inspections if it begins uranium enrichment. *—PTI*

EPSTEIN FILES

Police search Andrew's home, following his release

LONDON/ WASHINGTON, 20 FEB

Former prince Andrew and an unidentified woman. Photo: *—x*

Police continued on Friday to search the former home of Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, a day after the former prince was held in custody for nearly 11 hours on suspicion of misconduct in public office linked to late convicted sex offender **Jeffrey Epstein**.

Cops arrested Andrew at his Norfolk residence on Thursday, although he has neither been charged nor exonerated by the police.

While the search of his current Sandringham residence has concluded, police continued their search of Royal Lodge, his former residence. Officers are also investigating his properties in Berkshire and Norfolk.

Evidence from the US Department of Justice files released in January suggests that Andrew shared confidential trade reports with Epstein while serving as UK's trade envoy.

The allegations being investigated are separate from those made by late Virginia Giuffre. She claimed to be trafficked to Britain to have sex with Andrew in 2001, when she was 17 years old. Giuffre died by suicide last year, following a post in 2019 that she was not suicidal. Her family has also questioned the circumstances around her alleged suicide.

Andrew has consistently denied any wrongdoing regarding his ties to Epstein. In a 2019 trainwreck BBC interview, he denied having sexual relations with Giuffre, who said that he was "sweating heavily" during the alleged encounter. Andrew said that he had a medical condition which prevented him from sweating.

Andrew's arrest follows years of scrutiny into his link to Epstein. Recently, King Charles III evicted him from Royal Lodge, after Giuffre's posthumous memoir.

US President Donald Trump described the arrest a "shame" and "bad for the royal family." *—AGENCIES*

A video released by the Pentagon shows a 'UFO' flying off the coast of San Diego in July 2019 *—US DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE*

Don orders release of govt files on UFOs

WASHINGTON, 20 FEB

US President Donald Trump said Thursday that he's directing the Pentagon and other government agencies to identify and release files on extraterrestrials and unidentified flying objects (UFOs).

Trump made the announcement on social media after he accused former president Barack Obama of disclosing "classified information".

Earlier in the day the Republican president claimed that one of his Democratic predecessors, Barack Obama, had revealed "classified" information in his recent viral podcast remarks about the existence of extraterrestrial life.

"They're real, but I haven't seen them and they're not being kept in... Area 51," Obama told host Brian Tyler Cohen, referring to the top-secret US military facility in Nevada at the heart of many UFO conspiracy theories.

"Based on the tremendous interest shown, I will be directing the Secretary of War, and other relevant Departments, to begin the process of identifying and releasing Government files related to alien and extraterrestrial life, unidentified aerial phenomena (UAP), and unidentified flying objects (UFOs)," Trump posted on his Truth Social platform.

This follows Obama saying in a podcast interview that aliens were real'.

Obama later clarified that he had not seen evidence that aliens "have made contact with us," but said, "statistically, the universe is so vast that the odds are good there's life out there."

Trump's daughter-in-law Lara Trump had she that the President would deliver a speech on aliens at the "right time."

The All-Domain Anomaly Resolution Office submitted an unclassified report to Congress in June 2024.

Mentioning a total of 485 reports of unidentified phenomena in the past year but 118 cases were found to be "prosaic objects such as various types of balloons, birds, and unmanned aerial systems." *—PTI*

Supreme Court judge refers to tariffs imposed on India for buying Russian

NEW YORK/ WASHINGTON, 20 FEB

As the US Supreme Court on Friday struck down President Donald Trump's sweeping tariffs, Justice Brett Kavanaugh referred to the tariffs imposed on India for Russian oil purchases in his dissenting opinion.

Trump had imposed 25 per cent reciprocal tariffs on India and an additional 25 per cent punitive tariff for Delhi's purchases of Russian oil.

While he slashed the reciprocal tariffs to 18 per cent, the 25 per cent levies imposed for Russian oil purchases were removed, with Trump noting the commitment by India to stop importing energy from Moscow and purchasing American energy products.

"To be sure, most foreign affairs and national security actions -- whether war, international agreements, trade deals, or tariffs -- lead to significant domestic ramifications within the United States. And this case is no exception," Kavanaugh wrote.

Treasure collected $133B

The Treasury had collected more than $133 billion from the import taxes the president has imposed under the emergency powers law as of December, federal data shows. The impact over the next decade was estimated at some $3 trillion.

Presidential import taxes, imposed under emergency powers, have funneled over $133 billion into the Treasury as of December *—PTI*

The decision doesn't stop Trump from imposing duties under other laws. Top administration officials have said they expect to keep the tariff framework in place.

The Republican president has been vocal about the case, calling it one of the most important in US history and saying a ruling against him would be an economic body blow to the country. But legal opposition crossed the political spectrum, including libertarian and pro-business groups that are typically aligned with the GOP. Polling has found tariffs aren't broadly popular with the public.

The Constitution gives Congress the power to levy tariffs. But the Trump administration argued that a 1977 law allowing the president to regulate importation during emergencies also allows him to set tariffs. Other presidents have used the law to impose sanctions, but Trump was the first to invoke it for import taxes.

Trump set what he called "reciprocal" tariffs on most countries in April 2025 to address trade deficits that he declared a national emergency. Those came after he imposed duties on Canada, China and Mexico, ostensibly to address a drug trafficking emergency.

A series of lawsuits followed, including a case from a dozen Democratic-leaning states. They argued that the emergency powers law does not even mention tariffs. Furthermore, Trump's use of it fails several legal tests, including one called the major questions doctrine that doomed former president Joe Biden's USD 500 billion student loan debt forgiveness programme. *—PTI*

Ex-S Korean prez Yoon remains defiant after sentence

SEOUL, 20 FEB

- Yoon Suk Yeol stands by his declaration of martial law in December 2024, saying it was done "solely for the sake of the nation and our people,"

Ousted South Korean president **Yoon Suk Yeol** on Friday remained defiant in his first reaction to a life sentence for rebellion handed down by a Seoul court on Thursday.

In a statement released by his lawyers, Yoon maintained that his abrupt and short-lived declaration of martial law in December 2024 was allegedly done "solely for the sake of the nation and our people," and dismissed the Seoul Central District Court as biased against him.

Yoon rejected the verdict as illegitimate, stating: "In a situation where the independence of the judiciary cannot be guaranteed and a verdict based on law and conscience is difficult to expect, I feel deep scepticism whether it would be meaningful to continue a legal battle through an appeal."

The ousted president has only seven days to appeal his sentence and says, "our fight is not over." *—PTI*

DIAGNOSED WITH ALS

'Grey's Anatomy' star Eric Dane dies at 53

NEW YORK, 20 FEB

Eric Dane, the celebrated actor best known for his television roles on 'Grey's Anatomy' and 'Euphoria' died on Thursday at age 53. Dane died from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), less than a year after he announced his diagnosis.

Dane is survived by his wife, actor Rebecca Gayheart, and their two teen daughters, Billie Beatrice and Georgia Geraldine. "He spent his final days surrounded by friends, his devoted wife, and his two daughters, Billie and Georgia," said a statement by representatives.

Dane garnered a devoted fanbase with his role as Dr Mark Sloan—or as fans may remember him, McSteamy—in the mid-2000s ABC medical drama 'Grey's Anatomy'. He played the role from 2006 until his character died in 2012. He later reprised his role in 2021.

In 2019, he proved himself as more than just a heartthrob by playing a troubled father, Cal Jacobs, in HBO's provocative teen-drama 'Euphoria', a role he continued in up until his death.

In April 2025, Dane revealed he had been diagnosed with ALS (also known as Lou Gehrig's disease), a progressive terminal neurodegenerative condition that destroys nerve cells controlling movement, speech, and breathing. With no cure, most patients die within three to five years of diagnosis.

His memoir, 'Book of Days: A Memoir in Moments', will be published later this year by Maria Shriver's The Open Field, an imprint of Penguin Random House. *—PTI*

KIM VOWS TO BOOST ECONOMY AT RARE CONGRESS MEETING

SEOUL, 20 FEB

North Korean leader **Kim Jong Un** pledged to improve living standards as he opened the ruling Workers' Party Congress, the country's most important political event, where he is set to outline his five-year domestic and foreign policy agenda

The event began with Kim's economy focused speech.

According to state media (KCNA), Kim said that increased national prestige and military strength created "favourable conditions" to accelerate socialist construction. "Our party is faced with boosting economic construction and standard of living and transforming all realms of state and social life."

"This requires us to wage a active and persistent struggle without a moment's stagnation."

KCNA said the meeting in Pyongyang will define major policy goals for the coming years and strengthen the party's organisational capabilities.

Kim recently has leveraged Russia's war on Ukraine to advance nuclear and missile capabilities while providing troops to Moscow, and also strengthening ties with China. *—PTI*

Gold climbs to Rs 1.59 lakh/10g; Silver trades flat

NEW DELHI, 20 FEB

Gold prices appreciated by Rs 850 to Rs 1,59,500 per 10g in the national capital on Friday, while silver stayed flat at Rs 2.64 lakh per kg, tracking a firm global trend, according to marketmen. However, silver prices remained unchanged at Rs 2,64,000 per kg. In the international market, spot gold gained USD 30.83, or 0.62 per cent, to USD 5,027.13 per ounce, while silver was trading 2.55 per cent higher at USD 80.5 per ounce. "Gold has rebounded above USD 5,020 per ounce, while silver has also surged to around USD 81 driven by rising concerns over a potential US-Iran conflict," Kaynat Chainwala, AVP Commodity Research, Kotak Securities, said. *—PTI*

Rupee plummets by 31P, settles at 90.99 against USD

MUMBAI, 20 FEB

The rupee plunged 31 paise to settle at 90.99 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday, tracking a strong American currency against major currencies and higher crude oil prices amid intensifying US-Iran tensions. Positive momentum in domestic equity markets failed to support the Indian, forex analysts said. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 90.94 against the US dollar and touched the intraday low of 91.04 during the session. It ended the session at 90.99 (provisional), registering a steep loss of 31 paise from the previous closing level. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading higher by 0.01 per cent at 97.86. *—PTI*

Microsoft Prez launches AI skilling for 20L teachers

NEW DELHI, 20 FEB

Tech giant Microsoft on Friday launched 'Elevate for Educators in India', an initiative to skill 20 lakh teachers in artificial intelligence and reach 2 lakh educational institutions by 2030. Microsoft vice chair and president Brad Smith launched the initiative during his visit to a CM SHRI school in Delhi. India is the first country in Asia to launch the programme. The model brings together eight components — AI-based smart classrooms, career counselling labs, ICT labs, digital libraries, multi-sectoral skills labs, language labs, resource rooms for inclusive education and a digital portal for competitive exam preparation. The programme will be delivered in partnership with Central Board of Secondary Education and other government departments and agencies. *—PTI*

Jaypee Infratech's ex-MD surrenders in fraud case

NEW DELHI, 20 FEB

Former Jaypee Infratech MD Manoj Gaur surrendered before Tihar Jail authorities after a Delhi court recently rejected his plea for a regular bail in a Rs 14,599 crore homebuyers fraud-linked money laundering case. Gaur, who had secured interim bail, is now lodged in Tihar Jail. A Delhi court had said that the allegations against him involved cheating and criminal breach of trust concerning numerous people. The businessman was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate in November, 2025. The federal agency has alleged that Jaiprakash Associates Limited and Jaypee Infratech Limited collected over Rs 33,000 crore for constructing the residential projects in Noida and Greater Noida and diverted the fund for other purposes other than construction. *—PTI*

Qualcomm, Tata to make auto modules in Assam

This enables local mfg for digital cockpits & infotainment

NEW DELHI, 20 FEB

US chip firm Qualcomm Technologies and Tata Electronics have signed a pact under which Tata Electronics will manufacture Qualcomm Automotive Modules in Assam, a joint statement said on Friday.

With this new cooperation, Tata Electronics joins Qualcomm Technologies' global network of module manufacturing partners aimed at supporting the growing global demand for modular automotive platforms.

"Aligned with the 'Make in India' initiative, Qualcomm Technologies will manufacture Qualcomm Automotive Module products in India at Tata Electronics' upcoming semiconductor assembly and test (OSAT) facility in Jagiroad, Assam," the statement said.

The collaboration aims to enable local production of automotive technologies for digital cockpits, infotainment, connectivity, and intelligent vehicle systems, addressing growing demand from Indian and global automakers while enhancing supply chain flexibility and geographic diversification. Automotive Modules integrate the Snapdragon Digital Chassis system-on-chips (SoCs) with essential system components into a single, production-ready module, delivering comprehensive electronics platforms for automakers. Automotive Modules enable scalable, turnkey architectures that support the industry's transition to software-defined vehicles.

"Our work with Tata Electronics marks an important milestone in our automotive growth strategy. As the industry accelerates its shift toward integrated, module-based architectures, expanding manufacturing capacity in key regions becomes essential," said Nakul Duggal, EVP and Group GM, Automotive, Industrial and Embedded IoT, and Robotics, Qualcomm Technologies, Inc. *—PTI*

'India-US tie critical in ensuring AI benefits'

NEW DELHI, 20 FEB

The US-India partnership has a critical role to play in making the benefits of AI available to everyone and everywhere, said **Sundar Pichai**, CEO of Google on Friday.

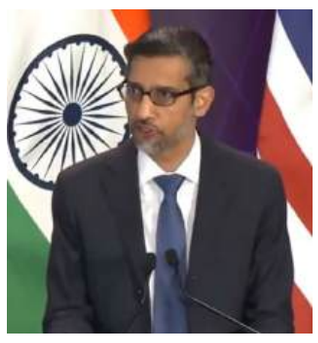
Speaking here at the AI Impact Summit ahead of India and US signing of Pax Silica declaration, he said alongside the interim trade agreement, this will lay a strong foundation for a robust US India tech partnership.

Pichai said Google is proud to serve as a connection point between the two countries "both figuratively and literally".

The US-led strategic alliance Pax Silica, is aimed at building a resilient supply chain for critical minerals and artificial intelligence.

Elaborating, he said, "We have teams across both countries working seamlessly together on some of our most important initiatives, innovations that start in India."

He listed several initiatives undertaken by Google in India, including partnerships with the government to bring AI applications with real world impact such as timely monsoon forecasts to farmers and helping healthcare workers screening for diseases, besides the USD 15 billion investment in Indian infrastructure with AI hub in Vizag in Andhra Pradesh. *—PTI*



OpenAI, Microsoft join UK AI safety alliance

OpenAI and Microsoft have joined the UK-led international coalition to promote safe and secure artificial intelligence development. The companies committed additional funding to the UK AI Security Institute's flagship Alignment Project, ensuring advanced AI systems remain safe, secure, and under human control. The total funding for AI alignment research now exceeds GBP 27 million, with OpenAI contributing GBP 5.6 million. The project, which already supports 60 research efforts across eight countries, aims to build public trust and facilitate responsible AI integration into public services and infrastructure. —ANI

'Biology & AI merger to reshape healthcare'

Biocon Chairperson Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw said the convergence of biology and artificial intelligence could transform medicine, driving advances in predictive healthcare, regenerative science and lifespan management. Speaking at the AI Impact Summit, she noted AI enables deeper biological insights and could help reprogramme cells, calling it the "holy grail" of medicine. She added that India's open digital infrastructure and large-scale data generation position the country to lead this global shift. —PTI

'Policymakers must ensure ethical AI use'

Arundhati Bhattacharya, CEO of Salesforce South Asia, emphasised at India AI Summit 2026 that India will adopt AI easily, but policymakers must create an ethical ecosystem prioritising data privacy. She highlighted the importance of infrastructure and responsible skilling, urging companies to help people understand AI's benefits and risks. Bhattacharya stressed that policymakers, infrastructure providers, and companies share responsibility for ensuring ethical AI adoption that improves lives without compromising privacy rights. —PTI

'Govt plans complete AI stack for innovation'

Union Minister Jayant Chaudhary on Friday announced India's plan to create a comprehensive AI stack based on anonymised datasets for researchers and startups. He proposed establishing an audit trail mechanism, potentially with reports from the CAG, to ensure accountability. Highlighting the public-private partnership model, Chaudhary stressed the human-centric approach, noting India's focus on balancing trust, privacy, and innovation. The country aims to surpass 1,00,000 GPUs for AI development, fostering academia-industry collaboration. —PTI

FOR HARNESSING AI

Modi meets startup CEOs, discusses AI in agri & education

NEW DELHI, 20 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday discussed the potential of harnessing artificial intelligence in sectors like agriculture, environmental protection and education with CEOs of AI and deeptech startups.

CEOs and founders of 16 AI and deeptech startups presented their ideas and work at a roundtable meeting with Modi. Modi underscored the need for strong data governance, cautioned against misinformation, and urged the development of solutions tailored to India's needs.

Referring to UPI as a model of simple and scalable digital innovation, he expressed confidence in Indian companies and encouraged trust in domestic products.

He also spoke about expanding private participation in the space sector and noted strong investor interest in Indian startups.

Modi discussed the potential of harnessing AI technology in monitoring crop productivity and fertilizer usage to safeguard soil health. He called for expanding the AI tools for higher education in mother tongue.

Modi also congratulated innovators for taking bold risks and building impactful solutions.

In healthcare, the PMO said they use AI for advanced diagnostics, gene therapy, and efficient patient record management to extend quality care to the last mile.

In agriculture, they leverage geospatial and underwater intelligence to boost productivity and help manage climate risks.

The group also included ventures focused on cybersecurity, ethical AI, space, social empowerment through vernacular access to justice and education, and modernising legacy systems to strengthen enterprise productivity.

These startups praised the country's sustained push to strengthen its artificial intelligence ecosystem. *—PTI*

CRUDE OIL FUTURES RISE TO RS 6,060/BARREL

NEW DELHI, 20 FEB

Crude oil prices edged up to Rs 6,060 per barrel in futures trade on Friday, supported by firm spot demand and mounting geopolitical tensions.

On the Multi Commodity Exchange, crude for March delivery rose by Rs 2, or 0.03 per cent, to Rs 6,060 per barrel in 5,064 lots. Analysts said fresh buying by traders kept futures prices elevated.

In international markets, West Texas Intermediate climbed 0.93 per cent to USD 67.05 per barrel, while Brent crude gained 0.29 per cent to USD 71.87 per barrel.

According to Axis Securities, crude prices have moved above the $66 mark for first time since August 2025, signalling a bullish trend. *—PTI*

2,265 STOCKS DECLINE

Sensex, Nifty rebound amid optimism over trade deal

MUMBAI, 20 FEB

Stock markets rebounded on Friday, with the benchmark Sensex closing higher by 316 points after heavy buying in banking and metal shares, amid optimism over progress on a trade deal and India's participation in Pax Silica.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 316.57 points, or 0.38 per cent, to settle at 82,814.71. During the day, the benchmark appreciated by 633.94 points, or 0.76 per cent, to hit an intraday high of 83,132.08.

The 50-share NSE Nifty advanced 116.90 points, or 0.46 per cent, to close at 25,571.25, as 36 of its components ended in the positive zone and 14 in the red. In the intraday session, it jumped by 209.2 points, or 0.82 per cent, to hit a high of 25,663.55.

The Sensex, on Thursday, tanked 1,236.11 points, and the NSE Nifty slumped 365 points to close near 25,450, following across-the-board selling by investors amid growing geopolitical concerns.

NTPC, Larsen & Toubro, Hindustan Unilever, PowerGrid, Tata Steel, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Bharat Electronics Ltd, Bajaj Finance, Titan, Maruti Suzuki India, Axis Bank and IndiGo were the major gainers on Friday among Sensex stocks.

On the other hand, Tech Mahindra, Infosys, Eternal, HCL Technologies, Bharti Airtel, HDFC Bank, Mahindra & Mahindra and Adani Ports ended with losses.

A total of 2,265 stocks declined, while 1,917 advanced and 167 remained unchanged on the BSE. *—PTI*

Retail buying hits 14-month high in Jan: NSE

Retail investors made a record net purchase in the Indian stock markets in January 2026, with net buying of Rs 16,944 crore, the highest investment in the last 14 months, a report by the National Stock Exchange stated. This substantial buying activity played a key role in offsetting earlier outflows during the financial year. As a result, the cumulative net outflow for FY26 narrowed significantly to Rs 687 crore, bringing the retail investor category close to a net-neutral position. As regards participation in the primary market, total net inflows from individual investors for FY26 stood at Rs 40,685 crore. —PTI

Novartis AG to sell 71% stake to ChrysCapital

NEW DELHI, 20 FEB

Swiss company Novartis has inked a pact with ChrysCapital group to sell entire 70.68 per cent stake in its Indian arm in a deal worth around Rs 1,446 crore.

The divestment follows a strategic review announced and conducted by Novartis AG starting in February 2024.

The closing of the transaction is subject to the satisfaction of certain conditions and is expected to close in the third quarter of 2026.

Shares of Novartis India were trading 17.8 per cent up at Rs 978.25 a piece on BSE.

The acquirers have made a mandatory open offer to the public shareholders to acquire up to 64,19,608 shares constituting 26 per cent stake at]Rs 860.64 per share aggregating to Rs 552.49 crore.

Upon the completion of transfer of shares, Novartis will complete its transformation into a pure-play innovative medicines company and continue to adapt its footprint for efficient, sustainable long-term growth.

Novartis will continue its presence in India through Novartis Healthcare Pvt Ltd, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Novartis group.

NHPL includes the commercial arm of Novartis in India, the Novartis Corporate Center in Hyderabad, and R&D teams, which currently conduct clinical trials at more than 300 sites in the country." *—PTI*

A YOUNG TECHIE

8-yr-old coder steals spotlight at AI Summit

NEW DELHI, 20 FEB

Amongst the pool of adult and senior tech leaders, an eight-year-old coder stole the spotlight as the youngest speaker the AI Impact Summit 2026 had seen so far.

According to news agency ANI, Ranvir Sachdeva, who called himself a "technologist", became the youngest person so far to speak at the ongoing Summit.

While on stage, Sachdeva spoke about how he is connecting ancient philosophies to modern-day technologies.

He said, "I'm here as the youngest keynote speaker at the India AI Impact Summit. I'm talking about how I'm linking ancient Indian philosophies to modern-day technologies. I'm also covering the different approaches which the rest of the nations are building AI with."

He also talked about how India is building its AI and shared his own ways of using a new Indian AI model.

said "I'm talking about how India is building AI with. I'm sharing my own use case of an Indian AI model just released and how I'm contributing to India's GDP and driving AI literacy with it."

The young tech also met with some of the tech giants at the Summit and posted the pictures on his Instagram. He met Google CEO Sundar Pichai and OpenAI Sam Altman. He also met Salesforce CEO Marc Benioff, Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Doreen Bogdan-Martin and Apple CEO Tim Cook during various events in the past years. *—Agencies*

- According to news agency ANI, Ranvir Sachdeva, who called himself a "technologist", became the youngest person so far to speak at the ongoing Summit.

OpenAI CEO Sam Altman with Ranvir Sachdeva at AI Impact Summit, in New Delhi —INSTAGRAM

Govt unveils 7 measures to boost e-commerce exports

NEW DELHI, 20 FEB

The government on Friday announced seven measures, including credit assistance for e-commerce exporters and support for alternative trade instruments, with an aim to promote the country's outbound shipments.

These measures are part of the Rs 25,060 crore export promotion mission. Out of 10 components of the mission, three have already been rolled out in January. To support exporters using digital channels, the commerce ministry announced credit facilities with interest subvention and partial credit guarantees.

The Direct E-Commerce Credit Facility will provide support up to Rs 50 lakh with 90 per cent guarantee coverage. The Overseas Inventory Credit Facility will extend support up to Rs 5 crore with 75 per cent guarantee coverage, and an interest subvention of 2.75 per cent will be available, subject to an annual ceiling of Rs 15 lakh per applicant, the commerce ministry said.

Assistance is capped at Rs 50 lakh per MSME annually and will be processed via a digital claim mechanism. *—PTI*

X/@MAIER

Daniela Maier wins Olympic gold in women's skicross

LIVIGNO, 20 FEB

Daniela Maier surged to victory in the Milano Cortina 2026 freestyle skiing women's skicross event on Friday. The German delivered an exceptional performance to win gold, with Fanny Smith of Switzerland taking silver and Sweden's Beijing 2022 Olympic champion Sandra Naslund claiming bronze. "It's insane," Maier told reporters after the race. "I cannot really say what it means to me because I'm not realising it yet. "My full ski club is here. These are the people that are cheering, and it was just an incredible day. "I had a lot of fun doing the runs, and now I have something really beautiful golden around my neck. It's really nice." This was the second medal of Maier's Winter Olympics career.—*PTI*

Keely smashes world indoor 800m record in Lievin

DUBAI, 20 FEB

Keely Hodgkinson on Thursday smashed the women's world indoor 800 metres record set by Slovenia's Jolanda Ceplak on the day Britain's Olympic champion was born nearly 24 years ago.Hodgkinson clocked 1:54.87 at the World Athletics Indoor Tour Gold meeting in Lievin, France , to slice 0.95 seconds off the mark of 1:55.82 that Ceplak set the record up on March 3, 2002."Thank you for the amazing crowd," Hodgkinson was quoted as saying on the World Athletics website. I could hear you all the way around.—*PTI*

UK Athletics pleads guilty to corporate manslaughter

LONDON, 20 FEB

UK Athletics pleaded guilty on Friday to the corporate manslaughter of a Paralympian who died during training. Abdullah Hayayei was fatally injured when he was hit on the head by a metal pole at Newham Leisure Centre in east London on 11 July, 2017. UK Athletics Ltd, the national governing body for athletics, admitted corporate manslaughter at an Old Bailey hearing, having previously denied the charge. The 36-year-old Hayayei was preparing to represent the United Arab Emirates in the F34 class discus, javelin, and shot put at the World Para Athletics Championships in London when part of a throwing cage fell on him.—*PTI*

X/@VERSTAPPEN

F1 CEO dismisses Verstappen's retirement hint

LONDON, 20 FEB

Formula 1 chief executive Stefano Domenicali has dismissed Max Verstappen's suggestion that new F1 regulations could influence the Dutch driver's future in the sport. The four-time champion has been a vocal critic of the sweeping changes to F1 regulations for 2026, calling the cars, which rely more on electrical power than before, "no fun" to drive and likening them to all-electric series Formula E "on steroids". In comments on an episode of the "Up to Speed" podcast released Thursday, Verstappen also said the regulations wouldn't help the "longevity" of his career. "I met Max yesterday, because as you know, Max is incredible and he has a way of saying something that could be sometimes interpreted in a certain way," Domenicali told reporters during preseason testing in Bahrain on Thursday.—*PTI*

Pakistan to tour Bangladesh next month for a 3-match ODI series

– PTI

LAHORE, 20 FEB

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) said on Friday that the Green Shirts would tour Bangladesh in March for a three-match One Day International (ODI) series.

PCB said that the team would arrive in Bangladesh on 9 March and hold a training session the next day, ahead of the opening ODI against the hosts on 11 March. The board added that the second ODI would be played on March 13, while the third and final match was scheduled for 15 March. It added that all three matches would be played at the Shere Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Dhaka.

"This will be Pakistan's second tour of Bangladesh since July 2025. Pakistan last toured Bangladesh for a three-match T20I series in July, which the hosts won 2-1. Meanwhile, Bangladesh toured Pakistan for a three-match T20I series in May/June last year, which the Salman-led side won 3-0," the PCB said. The development comes after Pakistan announced it would boycott the match against India during the ongoing T20 World Cup. The decision came after Bangladesh's request to shift its matches out of India was rejected amid tensions between the two countries, which led to the team being replaced by Scotland in the tournament. The situation ultimately led to a delegation from the International Cricket Council visiting Pakistan, after which it was announced that Pakistan would play the match against India. However, the ICC also announced that Bangladesh would not face any penalty for opting out of the tournament and would also host an ICC event before the Men's Cricket World Cup in 2031. —*PTI*

NZ batters aim to tame Pak spinners in Super 8 clash

Kiwi batters are yet to hit top gear in the ICC showpiece

COLOMBO, 20 FEB

The New Zealand middle-order's ability to mount a strong response when faced with the guile and variety in Pakistan's spin unit will be the deciding factor when the two sides face each other in the opening Super Eight Group 2 match of the T20 World Cup here on Saturday.

The Kiwi batters are yet to hit the top gear in the ICC showpiece, except for openers Tim Seifert and Finn Allen, who have three fifties between them. But their middle-order colleagues have not been able to back them up sufficiently, as the likes of Glenn Phillips, Rachin Ravindra, Mark Chapman, and Daryl Mitchell have struggled for consistency. Phillips and Ravindra have a fifty each, but they don't have anything much to show around overall.

From four matches, Ravindra has made 72 runs, but 59 of them came in a single match against Canada.

That they will be playing in Colombo for the first time in this tournament complicates matters further.

In contrast, Pakistan has been stationed in this port city since the beginning of the World Cup, and has already played two matches at the Premadasa.

Their bowlers, spinners to be particular, know the pace and length required to be effective on this sluggish pitch where shot-making needs more prudence than bravado.

Therefore, the New Zealand middle-order should support the Powerplay explosiveness off Allen and Seifert with a mature outing to take their side to a total of around 180, or while chasing a target in that vicinity.

Usman Tariq has a unique action: NZ batter Chapman

New Zealand middle-order batter Mark Chapman banked on the familiarity factor to tame the mystery spinner Usman Tariq-led Pakistan bowling unit in their T20 World Cup Group 2 Super 8s match here on Saturday.

Since 2024 August, New Zealand has played Pakistan in 20 bilateral matches across ODIs and T20Is, and Chapman averred that those games have given his side a good understanding of Pakistan's attack.

"Obviously, Usman Tariq has a pretty unique action with the way that he stops at the crease, so I mean that's

something to factor in. But for us, Pakistan has several really good spinners, so each of them poses their own threat," said Chapman in the pre-match press conference here on Friday.

"So, Pakistan is one of the teams that we've played probably the most frequently over the last few years. So, we're well aware of what they're going to bring. It's just about making sure we're really clear in the way that we want to play as a team," he added. The match starts at 7 pm IST—*PTI*

ICC is facing criticism over T20 WC Super 8 format

The International Cricket Council (ICC) is facing a sporting controversy, with severe backlash over the T20 World Cup 2026 Super 8 format. As the names of the 8 teams to qualify for the next round of the tournament were finalised, ICC found itself in the middle of a social media storm over the 'pre-seeding' format. As a result, all four group winners are in the same Super 8 group, while the 4 runners-up are in the second group.

FIH PRO LEAGUE

Skipper Hardik Singh –PTI

Indian hockey team eyes turnaround in Hobart leg

HOBART, 20 FEB

Outplayed at home, the Indian men's hockey team would be eager to bounce back and make a fresh start under new skipper Hardik Singh when it begins the FIH Pro League's overseas leg with a game against Spain here on Saturday.

The Hobart leg of the series, which also features hosts Australia, will be held till February 25 at the Tasmania Hockey Centre. The recent Rourkela leg proved to be a painful learning curve for the Indians with losses to Argentina and Belgium. Regular skipper Harmanpreet Singh has taken a break to welcome his second child from the upcoming clutch of matches. The team views these fixtures as a vital opportunity to test combinations, refine structure, and build momentum ahead of the upcoming FIH World Cup and the subsequent Asian Games.

After the campaign-opener against Spain, a high-octane clash against Australia is lined up for Sunday. They will face Spain again on February 24 before concluding the leg with a final match against the formidable Australian side on February 25.

India and Spain have been evenly matched in their last 10 encounters, claiming four regulation wins each, alongside two draws that India went on to win in shootouts.

Against Australia, high-scoring drama has been a constant. The hosts hold the statistical edge in their last 10 meetings with six wins to India's two (and two draws).

Two-time Olympic bronze medallist Hardik will lead the side that also features young players like Amandeep Lakra and Manmeet Singh, both of whom are looking to build on their recent senior debuts.

"It is a tremendous honour to lead the national team in a prestigious tournament like the Pro League. While we will certainly miss Harmanpreet's presence on the pitch, his absence provides a valuable opportunity for the rest of the group to step up and take charge," said Hardik.

"As a team, we have reviewed our recent matches, learned our lessons, and are entering Hobart with a highly positive and aggressive mindset," asserted the midfield mainstay. —*PTI*

Radha's all-round brilliance takes India A to Women's final

BANGKOK, 20 FEB

Skipper Radha Yadav produced an excellent all-round effort to power India A into the final of the Women's Rising Stars T20 Asia Cup with a five-wicket victory over Sri Lanka A here on Friday.

Sri Lanka elected to bat after winning the toss, but the decision backfired spectacularly. The Indian bowlers, led by Radha, ran through the lineup to bowl them out for a paltry 118.

The left-arm spinner returned with fine figures of 4 for 19.

She was ably supported by another left-arm spinner, Tanuja Kanwar (2/20), and leg-spinner Prema Rawat (2/9).

Radha Yadav –PTI

For Sri Lanka, opener Sanjana Kavindi (31, 35b) offered a token fight.

The Lankans were placed at 71 for two in the 10th over but could not counter the Indian spinners from that point, losing the remaining eight wickets for 47 runs in a little over nine overs.

The only bright spot in their innings was a 36-run alliance between Kavindi and fellow opener Hansima Karunaratne (14).

India did not have too many moments of worry during the chase, apart from losing three wickets for 21 runs at one stage. That included top-scorer Vrinda Dinesh (42). But with Radha making an unbeaten 31 off 18 balls with seven fours, India sauntered past the rages in 13.3 overs.

3rd Women's T20I

India will need their batting big guns to fire collectively against an experienced Australian bowling group in the third and final women's T20 International to seal a historic maiden series triumph Down Under, here on Saturday.

Despite registering a few victories in the past, the Indian women are yet to score a bilateral series win in Australia across all three formats. To change that script, India needs a better batting effort here, and it starts from openers Smriti Mandhana and Shafali Verma. Both Smriti and Shafali got starts but failed to kick on, impeding India's relatively easy-looking chase of 164 in the second match.

The veteran Aussie trio of Kim Garth, Annabel Sutherland, and Sophie Molineux exploited that opening, getting rid of five Indian batters for a mere seven runs to wreck the chase.Match starts at 1.45 pm IST. —*PTI*

WOMEN'S ITF BENGALURU OPEN

Vaishnavi stuns Preston to reach SFs

BENGALURU, 20 FEB

Vaishnavi Adkar continued her dream run at the women's ITF Bengaluru Open, a USD 100,000 event, as she upset fourth seed Taylah Preston to reach the semifinals on Friday.

Vaishnavi, the 21-year-old wildcard currently ranked 690 in the world, took down Australian World No. 148 Preston 6-3, 1-6, 6-4 in an hour and 33 minutes at the S.M. Krishna Stadium. The Indian had earlier stunned eighth-seeded Japanese Mai Hontama in the second round.

World University Games bronze medallist Vaishnavi will face second-seeded Thai Lanlana Tararudee, World No. 126, for a place in the summit clash.

Following its successful initiatives in cycling, squash, and bridge, HCL Group on Friday announced the commencement of the HCL ITF W15 tennis tournament, scheduled from February 23 to March 1 at The Tennis Project, Gurugram.

Vaishnavi, the 21-year-old wildcard currently ranked 690 in the world, took down Australian World No. 148 Preston 6-3, 1-6, 6-4. –PTI

The tournament will bring together 60 world-class players competing for crucial WTA (Women's Tennis Association) world-ranking points and a total prize purse of USD 15,000.

The tournament provides an important platform for emerging Indian and international talent and features a highly competitive field. Thailand's Anchisa Chanta (WTA Ranking 440) enters as the top seed, while India's challenge is led by Zeel Desai (WTA Ranking 639), who is seeded fifth.

Five Indian players will secure direct entry into the main draw, four will receive wild cards in singles, and three pairs will feature in dou-

AUSTRALIA TOUR FIASCO

Pak govt revokes hockey captain Butt's 2-year ban

LAHORE, 20 FEB

The Pakistan government on Friday revoked national hockey team skipper Ammad Shakeel Butt's two-year ban imposed by the national federation (PHF), terming the step as "illegal and unconstitutional".

Just before resigning from his position as Pakistan Hockey Federation president on Thursday, Tariq Bugti banned Butt for two years for his criticism of the PHF following the skipper's outburst against the mismanagement during the recent Australia tour.

But patron-in-chief, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif-appointed interim president of the PHF, Muhuydin Ahmed Wani, reversed the decision, stating it was an "illegal and unconstitutional step" by Bugti. Bugti had resigned on Thursday in the wake of a huge fallout after the national side's return from Australia, where they faced logistical nightmares and had to stay in Airbnb residences despite the state-run Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) releasing 10 million rupees to the PHF for five-star hotel accommodation of the team during its FIH Pro League matches in Canberra.

Ammad Shakeel –PTI

A senior official of the Inter-Provincial Coordination Ministry (which looks after all sports-related issues) confirmed that Prime Minister Sharif had immediately accepted Bugti's resignation and appointed Wani as ad-hoc president of PHF and Brig Musratullah as Director-General. Wani is a senior bureaucrat and was secretary of the ministry. "Both will manage hockey affairs on an ad-hoc basis and try to repair the damage done," he said.

Soon after the team returned home in the early hours of Wednesday, Butt and some other senior players told the waiting media at the airport that they could not work any further with the current management of PHF and the team management. —*PTI*

Pereira leads Nottingham Forest to a 3-0 win

LONDON, 20 FEB

Vitor Pereira made an impact in his first game in charge, leading Nottingham Forest to a 3-0 victory at Fenerbahçe in the first leg of their Europa League playoff.

Defender Murillo, forward Igor Jesus, and captain Morgan Gibbs-White scored a goal apiece to put Forest in command ahead of the second leg at the City Ground.

Martin O'Neill didn't have much to celebrate in his 1,000th career game as manager as his Celtic lost 4-1 at home to Stuttgart.

Viktoria Plzen, the only unbeaten team in the league phase, remained without a defeat after a late equalizer earned a 2-2 draw against Panathinaikos in Athens.

In Thessaloniki, PAOK was beaten 2-1 by Celta Vigo on goals from Iago Aspas and Williot Swedberg in a rematch of the Greek side's 3-1 loss to the Spanish team in the league phase.

Zakaria El Ouahdi scored twice, and Bryan Heynen added one for visiting Genk in a 3-1 victory against Dinamo in Zagreb. —*PTI*